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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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No work, no pay: KSRTC warns staff against strike

Transport unions threaten strike from 20 May over wages

BENGALURU/MYSURU, 18 MAY

Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) on Monday warned employees of State-run transport corporations against joining the indefinite strike proposed from 20 May. Managing Director Akram Pasha stated that absentees would face "no work, no pay" action and disciplinary proceedings.

The strike, called by the Joint Action Committee of labour organisations, is expected to affect all four state-run transport corporations — Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC), Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC), North Western Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (NWKRTC) and Kalyana Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (KKRTC) — disrupting both city and intercity travel across Karnataka.

The strike is after transport workers' unions have rejected the government's recently approved 12.5 per cent wage hike —PTI

In a circular, Pasha said transport services are classified as essential services under the Karnataka Essential Services Maintenance Act (KESMA), 2013, and employees are therefore not permitted to go on strike. He also pointed out that talks between unions and the government are currently before the State Labour Commissioner, and labour laws do not allow strikes while conciliation proceedings are underway.

Pasha directed officials to ensure scheduled services continue without disruption. He also ordered that no leave be sanctioned from 20 May.

The strike is after transport workers' unions, representing more than 1.2 lakh employees, have rejected the government's recently approved 12.5 per cent wage hike, calling it inadequate in view of rising living costs. The unions are demanding a 25 per cent salary revision with retrospective effect from 1 January, 2024. They have also sought immediate payment of Rs 1,272 crore in pending arrears covering 26 months in a single instalment. Other demands include enhancement of medical and grocery allowances and release of delayed compensation and financial relief to families of transport workers who died during Covid-19.

Meanwhile, Mysuru Deputy Commissioner G Lakshmikanth Reddy directed officials to prepare alternative arrangements for commuters if the strike severely disrupts services. —*Salar News*

Bail is rule even in UAPA: SC flays own order in Umar case

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

Stressing that "bail is the rule and jail the exception" is not an empty statutory slogan, the SC on Monday questioned its 5 January judgment denying bail to activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam in the 2020 Delhi riots conspiracy case.

Justices BV Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan, while granting bail to Handwara resident Syed Iftikhar Andrabi in a narco-terror case probed by the NIA, said that it has "serious reservations" on the reasoning adopted by a different bench of the SC.

On 5 January, Justices Aravind Kumar and NV Anjaria refused bail to Khalid and Imam and said they should file fresh bail applications after the examination of protected witnesses a year later.

In its order pronounced on Monday, Justice Bhuyan criticised various aspects of the 5 January judgment, including foreclosing the right of the two appellants to seek bail for a period of one year.

Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam —x

He said that the 5 January judgement did not properly follow the judgment in the KA Najeeb case, which recognised long delay in trial as a ground for bail in cases under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and can override the statutory restrictions on bail under Section 43D(5) of the Act.

The SC said that the phrase, "bail is the rule and jail is the exception," is not merely an empty slogan.

"It is a constitutional principle flowing from Articles 21 and 22 of the Constitution and the presumption of innocence, which is the cornerstone of any society governed by law," the SC said. —*PTI*

India to celebrate Eid-ul-Adha on 28 May

BENGALURU, 18 MAY

Eid-ul-Adha will be celebrated in India on 28 May as the crescent moon marking the beginning of the Islamic month of Dhul-Hijja was not sighted on Sunday evening in most parts of the country. The Markazi Ru'yat-e-Hilal Committee, Karnataka, announced the decision after a meeting held on 17 May at Darul Awkaf, Cunningham Road, Bengaluru, under the Karnataka State Board of Auqaf. Consequently, 1 Dhul-Hijja 1447 AH falls on 19 May 2026, and Eid-ul-Adha on 28 May 2026. —*SALAR NEWS*

Tourist crushed to death by fighting jumbos in Dubare

BENGALURU, 18 MAY

A woman was crushed to death during a fight between two trained elephants at the Dubare camp in Karnataka's Kodagu district after one of the animals lost balance and fell on her, officials said on Monday. Minister for Forest, Ecology and Environment Eshwar Khandre, condoling the incident, ordered a detailed probe. He also directed authorities to ensure that the public maintains a safe distance from wildlife. —*SALAR NEWS*

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No petrol, diesel vehicles for cab aggregators in NCR

CHANDIGARH, 18 MAY

The Haryana Cabinet on Monday approved rules for grant of aggregator licences, mandating that all vehicles inducted into fleets of cab aggregators, delivery service providers and e-commerce entities in the National Capital Region (NCR) must be CNG, electric vehicles (EVs), battery-operated vehicles (BOVs) or powered by other cleaner fuels. Only CNG or electric three-wheeler auto-rickshaws will be additionally permitted in existing fleets within the NCR. The decision was taken at a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini in Chandigarh. —*PTI*

India will buy Russian oil despite US sanctions: Govt

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

India has been purchasing Russian oil irrespective of US sanctions waivers and will continue to do so based on commercial viability and energy needs, a senior petroleum ministry official said on Monday. "We have been purchasing from Russia earlier... before the waiver, during and now also," said Sujata Sharma, joint secretary in the petroleum ministry. A temporary US sanctions waiver allowing the sale and delivery of Russian seaborne crude expired on Saturday, marking the second time Washington has allowed the relief measure to lapse without clarity on an extension. The general licence, issued in mid-March and extended in April, was meant to ease pressure in global energy markets after the US-Israeli war against Iran triggered the largest-ever oil supply disruption. India, the world's third-largest crude importer, sharply increased purchases of Russian oil after Moscow's 2022 invasion of Ukraine triggered Western sanctions, making discounted Russian crude the core of its import basket. The continued flow of Russian crude comes even as Brent prices remain more than 50 per cent above pre-war levels. —*PTI*

BAY OF BENGALURU

A few hours of rain and Bengaluru, the IT capital of India, turned into a waterlogged mess on Monday, with several parts of the City reporting flood-like conditions. In Frazer Town, a newly built underpass was submerged with knee-deep water, making it difficult for motorists to pass through. Social media showed visuals of stranded vehicles, submerged roads and slow-moving traffic. The rains also reduced visibility affecting flight ops —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

Satheesan takes oath as Kerala CM

T'PURAM, 18 MAY

Vadasseri Damodara Menon Satheesan on Monday took oath as Kerala Chief Minister, leading the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) back to power after a decade with a decisive win over the Left Front. Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar administered the oath at a ceremony in Thiruvananthapuram, where Satheesan's 20-member Cabinet, including Ramesh Chennithala, also sworn in.

Among key ministers, PC Vishnunadh, 48, representing Kundara in Kollam, is a senior Congress leader and former KSU, Youth Congress and AICC office-bearer, now KPCC working president. Roji M John, 43, MLA from Angamaly and former NSUI president, is a JNU alumnus and first-time minister. Bindu Krishna, 53, elected from Kollam, has held senior organisational roles in Mahila Congress, AICC and KPCC.

KM Shaji, IUML leader from Vengara, is known for his strong speeches and long electoral career, while VE Abdul Gafoor, 49, son of VK Ebrahimkunju, made a surprise entry after defeating CPI(M)'s P Rajeev in Kalamassery. PK Basheer, 66, representing Ernad for the fourth term, enters Cabinet for the first time. N Shamsudheen, 56, from Mannarkkad, is a veteran IUML leader with strong grassroots support.

KA Thulasi, 52, MLA from Kongad (SC), is a former professor and spouse of MP VK Sreekandan. T Siddique, 51, from Kalpetta, is the only Muslim minister from Congress and a senior party organiser. M Liju, 46, won from Kayamkulam in his first electoral victory after two decades in politics.

OJ Janeesh, 37, the youngest minister and former Youth Congress state president, represents Kodungallur. —*PTI*

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Adani to pay US $275M in Iran sanction violation case

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

The Adani Group on Monday reached a settlement with the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control in an alleged sanctions violation case after extending "extensive cooperation" with investigators.

The matter relates to imports of Iranian LPG through Mundra Port in Gujarat. According to OFAC, Adani Enterprises Ltd (AEL) purchased LPG shipments from a Dubai-based trader between November 2023 and June 2025, which were represented as originating from Oman and Iraq. However, the shipments were ultimately sourced from Iran, which is subject to US sanctions.

The Dubai-based intermediary allegedly acted as a conduit for Iranian supply, despite presenting itself as a supplier of Omani and Iraqi LPG.

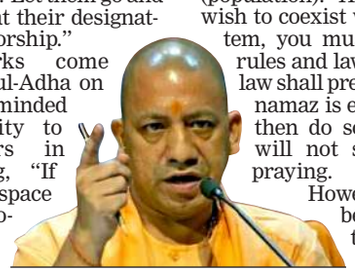
OFAC noted that none of the parties involved were sanctioned at the time and documentation provided to AEL did not indicate Iranian origin. This is the second US-related case resolved in recent days. —*PTI*

Yogi warns against namaz on roads

LUCKNOW, 18 MAY

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath warned against offering namaz on roads and advised that religious practices be conducted in shifts or at designated places of worship. Speaking at an event organised by a Hindi newspaper, Adityanath stated that blocking traffic for prayers or religious rituals would not be tolerated. He emphasised that roads are meant for commuting and not to create a spectacle, adding, "What right does anyone have to block a road? Let them go and offer prayers at their designated places of worship."

His remarks come ahead of Eid-ul-Adha on 28 May. He reminded the community to offer prayers in shifts, saying, "If you lack the space to accommodate everyone in your homes, then you must exercise control over your numbers (population)." He added, "If you wish to coexist within this system, you must abide by its rules and laws. The rule of law shall prevail. If offering namaz is essential to you, then do so in shifts. We will not stop you from praying. However, it will not be permitted on the streets." —*PTI*



PM calls for end to wars in Iran, Ukraine

OSLO, 18 MAY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday called for peaceful resolution of the conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia, saying military force alone could never ensure lasting peace.

Addressing the media after talks with Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre in Oslo, Modi said India and Norway believed in a rules-based international order, dialogue and diplomacy.

The two countries upgraded bilateral ties to a "Green Strategic Partnership" and agreed to deepen cooperation in clean energy, climate resilience, blue economy, green shipping, digital technology, space and Arctic research.

Støre said India and Norway may have differences, but must stand together against countries that "weaponise" diplomacy, trade and technology. Modi described the growing India-Europe relationship as entering a "golden era" amid global instability and conflict. He also highlighted the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement between India and the European Free Trade Association, saying it could bring USD 100 billion investment into India and create one million jobs over the next 15 years. The two sides agreed to expand cooperation in sustainability, health, ocean energy, artificial intelligence, cyber technology and skill development. Modi thanked Norway for supporting India's Arctic research station "Himadri" and welcomed the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Indian Space Research Organisation and the Norwegian Space Agency. —*PTI*

PM Narendra Modi was conferred with Norway's highest civilian honour by King Harald V, marking his 32nd international honour —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

CBI arrests key accused in murder of Bengal CM's aide

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

The CBI on Monday arrested Raj Kumar Singh, believed to be a key accused in the murder of West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari's aide Chandrakant Rath, officials said Monday.

Singh, who also goes by an alias of Raj Singh, was arrested from Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh by a team of CBI, they said.

Rath, the personal assistant to Adhikari, was shot dead in Madhyamgram on May 6, two days after the declaration of the fiercely contested West Bengal Assembly poll results.

The CBI has taken over the probe into Rath's murder from the West Bengal Police following a request from the state government.

The central agency has formed a seven-member special investigation team under a DIG of Special Crime from Delhi, comprising some of the best investigators drawn from its various units, the officials said. —*PTI*

BULLET TRAIN DREAMS

The Railways unveiled a concept photo of what India's 1st bullet train would look like. The Mumbai to Ahmedabad project is a 320 km/h high-speed train, expected to begin ops on 15 August, 2027. It will reduce travel time between the two cities to 2 hours from 7 to 9 hours —*PTI*

2018 ORDER OVERTURNED

BCCI not under RTI Act as it is not govt-controlled: CIC

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

The Central Information Commission (CIC) has ruled that the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is not a public authority under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, stating that it is not owned, controlled or substantially financed by the government.

The decision overturns a 2018 order which had classified the cricket body as a public authority and directed it to appoint central and assistant public information officers and a first appellate authority under the RTI framework.

The BCCI had challenged that order before the Madras High Court, leading to a fresh review of the matter.

Information Commissioner PR Ramesh held that although the BCCI performs important public functions such as cricket administration and representing India in international tournaments, this alone does not make it a public authority under RTI law.

The CIC noted that the BCCI is a private autonomous body registered under the Tamil Nadu Societies Registration Act and operates independently. Its revenue is generated through media rights, sponsorships, ticket sales, broadcasting contracts and other commercial activities.

Relying on Supreme Court judgments, including Zee Telefilms Ltd vs Union of India and Thalappalam Service Cooperative Bank Ltd vs State of Kerala, the Commission said regulatory oversight or public importance is not enough to bring an organisation under RTI.

Earlier, it was considered a public authority, but the latest order removes it from RTI coverage despite its significant role in Indian cricket.. —*PTI*

Mysuru man kills mother over suspected affair

MYSURU, 18 MAY

A woman was murdered allegedly by her son over suspicions of an extramarital relationship at Madalli village under Jayapura police limits. The deceased was identified as Sudha, and the accused as Veerabhadra, 27. Police have also arrested his cousins, Akash and Abhi. According to a police complaint, Sudha had an illicit relationship with a man from the same village. Despite advice from relatives and her son to end the affair, she continued. In a fit of rage, Veerabhadra severely injured her on Saturday. He then took her to a secluded spot at Kaniyanahundi, killed her by hitting her with a large stone. Police arrested Veerabhadra and the cousins, and an investigation is ongoing. —*SALAR NEWS*

Rs 4,500 cr ponzi scam accused sent to CID custody

BELAGAVI, 18 MAY

Shivanand Nilannavar, owner of Shivam Associates, accused of illegally collecting more than Rs 4,500 crore from the public by way of promising unusually high investment returns, has been remanded to 10 days' CID custody by a district court. Nilannavar was arrested by Belagavi Police on Friday and later handed over to the CID after the State Government transferred the case for further probe. On Monday, CID officials conducted his medical examinaiton at the district hospital before producing him in court. Following the court order, he was shifted to Bengaluru for detailed interrogation by the CID.

The court granted CID custody considering the scale of the alleged financial irregularities involving hundreds of crores of rupees. Nilannavar, who is a resident of Shivabasava Nagar in North Belagavi said to have allegedly mobilised public funds in violation of the cooperative department regulations.

The case was initially registered at Mal Maruti police station based on a complaint filed by the Registrar of Cooperative Societies. —*SALAR NEWS*

Jumbo fight at Dubare turns fatal for TN tourist

Two elephants began fighting during a bathing session at the Dubare Elephant Camp near Kushalnagar on Monday —*SCREENGRAB*

New govt SOP mandates 100 ft distance from elephants

BENGALURU, 18 MAY

A woman tourist was crushed to death during a clash between two trained elephants at the Dubare Elephant Camp in Karnataka's Kodagu district, prompting the State Government to impose stricter safety measures at elephant camps.

The victim, Tulasi, 33, from Tamil Nadu, was allegedly standing near the river watching elephants being bathed when the incident occurred on Monday.

According to forest officials, the trained elephants, Kanjan and Marthanda, suddenly began fighting during the bathing session.

Despite efforts by mahouts to control the animals, Kanjan charged at Marthanda and rammed him. Marthanda reportedly lost balance and fell, trapping Tulasi underneath. She died on the spot.

GOVT ISSUES SOP FOR TOURIST SAFETY

Following the incident, Forest Minister Eshwar B Khandre ordered immediate safety reforms at all elephant camps across the State. From Tuesday, tourists will not be allowed near elephants and must maintain a minimum distance of 100 feet while observing elephant bathing activities.

Officials said activities such as touching elephants' trunks, standing beside them for photographs, feeding them jaggery, bananas or other food items, and participating in elephant bathing sessions would be strictly prohibited. Tourists will also not be permitted to take selfies or photographs in close proximity to elephants under any circumstances.

Khandre said that even trained elephants and other wild animals can behave unpredictably, making it difficult to fully understand or anticipate their reactions at any given moment.

Khandre directed authorities to ensure that visitors maintain a prescribed safe distance from wildlife at all times.

The Minister further ordered a detailed investigation into the incident and asked forest officials to recommend long-term measures to prevent similar tragedies in the future.

Officials said the new restrictions are aimed at improving visitor safety while ensuring better management of captive elephants at tourist camps across Karnataka. —*Salar News*

WARNS AGAINST PANIC BUYING

OMCs assure adequate fuel stocks in State

BENGALURU, 18 MAY

Public sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) have assured that adequate stocks of petrol and diesel are available across Karnataka and urged consumers not to resort to panic buying or overstocking.

Siddharth Agarwal, State-Level Coordinator for the oil industry in Karnataka (IOC, BPCL and HPCL), said the entire fuel supply chain — from terminals and depots to retail outlets—is functioning normally without disruption. He stated that fuel supplies are being continuously monitored and replenishment operations are progressing smoothly across the state.

"All retail outlets are operating normally and are fully equipped to meet consumer demand. Adequate stocks of petrol and diesel are available across all outlets," he said, adding that the oil industry is closely coordinating logistics, stock movement and retail operations to ensure seamless availability. He urged the public to continue normal consumption patterns and avoid panic buying.

Meanwhile, political tensions surfaced over fuel price hikes, with AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge accusing the Centre and Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "lacking foresight" and contributing to rising inflation.

Speaking to reporters, Kharge alleged that the government delayed fuel price increases until after recent elections in four states and a Union Territory. He said petrol, diesel and LPG prices were increased immediately after the polls concluded, adding that the ruling party was aware of the impact such hikes would have had during elections.

He further claimed that the BJP-led government had failed to control inflation, stating that rising fuel prices were burdening the poor. Petrol and diesel prices were recently increased by Rs 3 per litre each, marking the first hike in over four years amid rising global crude prices linked to tensions in West Asia. —*PTI*

Man stabs grandmom, 70, for filing police complaint

BELAGAVI, 18 MAY

A 70-year-old woman was allegedly stabbed to death by her grandson in Agasage village in Belagavi taluk, just hours after she approached police seeking protection from his harassment.

The deceased, Balavva Kalgouda Patil, had reportedly gone to Kakati Police Station on Sunday night to lodge a complaint against her grandson Kalgouda over repeated harassment. Police, considering her age and the late hour, reportedly dropped her back to Agasage village in a police vehicle. Locals allege the accused was neither detained nor strictly warned, with police advising her to call emergency helpline 112 if the harassment continued.

Shortly after police left, Kalgouda allegedly attacked her with a knife, questioning what action authorities would take against him. Balavva sustained severe injuries and died on the spot.

Before her death, the woman reportedly showed neighbours a note containing the emergency number "112", written by police personnel, and asked them to seek help.

The blood-stained note has since become a disturbing symbol of the incident.

The accused fled after the attack. A search operation has been launched.

Locals claim Balavva had earlier lodged multiple complaints against her grandson, but no strict action was taken. —*Salar News*

WHEN IT RAINS, IT FLOODS

People wade through a waterlogged Seppings Road in Shivajinagar, Bengaluru, while vehicles remain partially submerged following heavy rain on Monday — *MOHAMMED ASAD*

KOGILU RESIDENTS PROTESTS

The sudden demolition of houses in Kogilu Layout slum is inhumane.
Atrocities against Dalits and minorities must be stopped immediately.

Kogilu residents protest at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Monday, demanding permanent housing after authorities razed over 150 illegal houses and sheds in Kogilu Layout across five acres of government land in December 2025. The eviction drive displaced 500 people —*SALAR NEWS*

Rajanna backs Parameshwara as CM

TUMAKURU, 18 MAY

Former State Minister KN Rajanna on Monday fuelled fresh speculation over a leadership change in the State, saying Home Minister G Parameshwara should become Chief Minister if Siddaramaiah steps down after the government's third anniversary. Speaking in Tumkur after the state government's achievement ceremony, Rajanna said, "We are saying that if Siddaramaiah wants a change, Parameshwara should become CM."

Recalling Parameshwara's tenure as Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee president, he said, "If he had won in 2013, he would have become CM. He didn't win then. The old dues are still pending." Rajanna added, "Is it Siddaramaiah's house to give away? Is it property? Power is not anyone's property."

He also hinted at discussions during the Kerala visit of senior Congress leaders, including Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and DK Shivakumar. "My expectation is that it can be final now," he said, adding that "three or four people will talk for five minutes and come up with an opinion."

"Whatever comes out of Rahul Gandhi's mouth will be implemented," Rajanna said. The remarks came amid continuing Karnataka Congress discussions over possible power-sharing arrangements after the government completes three years in office soon. —*ANI*

'Set up HC circuit bench in Mangaluru'

BENGALURU, 18 MAY

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, in a bid to ensure swift and accessible justice for people in the coastal region and across the state, has stated in a post on X that he has written to Chief Justice of High Court Vibhu Bakhru to set up a Circuit Bench of the court in Mangaluru, Dakshina Kannada district. He said the proposed bench would strengthen decentralisation of justice delivery. —*Salar News*

RAICHUR: 2 HELD FOR MURDER & ABDUCTION OF GIRL

RAICHUR, 18 MAY

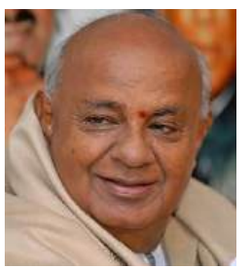
Raichur police have arrested two accused in the murder of a villager and the abduction of a minor girl linked to an alleged interfaith elopement in Yapaladinni village of Raichur taluk.

According to Superintendent of Police Arunanshu Giri, the incident occurred on the night of 5 May when 41-year-old Eshappa, sleeping on his terrace, noticed suspicious movement behind his house and questioned those present.

Police said the girl's alleged partner, Aslam, 22, a mechanic, and his associate Hussain, 23, a chicken shop worker, allegedly strangled Eshappa with a rope after he confronted them while they were attempting to flee with the 14-year-old girl.

After the murder, the accused allegedly escaped with the minor through Gadwal, Kurnool and Hyderabad before hiding in Solapur, Maharashtra. Police tracked and arrested them on 7 May. Cases under murder, kidnapping and POCSO provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, have been registered at Yapaladinni police station. The minor girl has been shifted to a children's shelter home. —*Salar News*

On 94th b'day, Deve Gowda vows to fight for people



BENGALURU, 18 MAY

Former prime minister HD Deve Gowda, who celebrated his 94th birthday on Monday, said he wanted to continue fighting for the cause of the people for as long as possible, even while moving around in a wheelchair. "I have a firm resolve to fight for the people's cause for as many more days as possible. I will not sit at home saying that I have completed 93 years. I will move around in the wheelchair," Gowda said.

Speaking to reporters, the JD(S) patriarch said he had been fighting throughout his 68-year political life and would continue doing his duty regardless of recognition. Gowda also expressed confidence that the JD(S)-BJP alliance would remain stable ahead of the 2028 Karnataka Assembly polls. "Since I have a good relationship with Modi and Shah, I have strong confidence that there won't be issues," he said.

He said Prime Minister Modi sent him a birthday message from Sweden, while Amit Shah and BS Yediyurappa greeted him over phone calls. He urged party workers to strengthen the JD(S) with honesty and discipline. —PTI

COSTS RS 35 CRORE

Kalaburagi Zoo opens doors to public

KALABURAGI, 18 MAY

The newly developed Kalaburagi Zoo, spread across 43 acres, inaugurated by Forest, Environment and Ecology Minister Eshwar B Khandre has been opened for the public here on Monday.

The zoo has been constructed at Madbul village in Chittapur taluk on a nearly 43 acres at a cost of Rs 35 crore under the joint initiative of the district administration, Forest Department, KKRDB Board, and Murthy Trust.

Speaking to reporters after inaugurating the Kalaburagi Zoo along with Rural Development, Panchayat Raj, IT-BT and Kalaburagi District In-charge Minister Priyank Kharge, Khandre said the zoo project was delayed for years, but after their government came to power, Priyank Kharge took special interest in accelerating the work.

Kalaburagi Zoo, spread across 43 acres, at Madbul village in Chittapur taluk —*SALAR*

With its inauguration, the Kalyana Karnataka region now has its second zoo after Hampi, and it is expected to become a major attraction for people of all age groups, the minister further said.

Kalaburagi Zoo is the ninth zoo in Karnataka. Referring to the 2022 animal census, he said Karnataka has 6,395 elephants and 563 tigers.

The zoo currently houses 56 different species of animals and birds. Two lions have already been brought from Bannerghatta Biological Park. Visitors can also see crocodiles, foxes and other animals. Khandre said more varieties of animals and birds would be added in the coming days. ——*Salar News*

TICKET PRICES:

- ₹75 for visitors above 12 years of age
- ₹40 for children below 12 years
- ₹25 for government schoolstudents

Tickets can be purchased directly at the zoo ticket counter.

Lulu Hypermarket launches Bengaluru's 6th store at Old Madras Road

Lulu Group India celebrated a milestone with the grand inauguration of its sixth Lulu Hypermarket in Bengaluru and its 18th store across India. The new outlet in Gopalan Grand Mall on Old Madras Road, Nagavarapalya, CV Raman Nagar, Bengaluru, officially opened its doors to the public on 3 May.

Spanning 58,516 sqft of thoughtfully designed retail space and offering dedicated parking for 200+ vehicles, the store is set to serve the community with unmatched convenience. The launch is also expected to generate over 1,000+ direct and indirect jobs.

Yusuff Ali MA, Chairman & Managing Director of Lulu Group said, "This store has been meticulously designed and curated to serve the vibrant, diverse community of Old Madras Road and its surrounding neighbourhoods. Every detail from store layout to product assortment reflects Lulu's commitment to delivering a premium yet accessible retail experience."

The store offers an expansive selection to meet every household need under one roof - farm fresh fruits and vegetables, meats, poultry, and fresh seafood meeting international quality standards, everyday grocery staples, cleaning supplies and personal care products to kitchenware and home utility items.

The grand inauguration ceremony was graced by Yusuff Ali MA, and C Gopalan, Chairman and Founder of Gopalan Group.

To celebrate, Lulu Hypermarket is offering special discounts and exclusive promotional deals. These offers are available till 21 May, 2026.

*Advertorial

UDF govt gifts women free bus rides

Honorarium hiked for ASHA workers, department set up for seniors

T-PURAM, 18 MAY

The new UDF government in Kerala announced a series of welfare measures like free travel for women in KSRTC buses from 15 June, enhanced honorarium for ASHA and Anganwadi workers, and the creation of a dedicated department for senior citizens.

Announcing the decisions taken at the first Cabinet meeting on Monday, Chief Minister VD Satheesan said detailed guidelines for the free bus travel scheme for women would be issued later.

The Cabinet also decided to constitute a separate department for elderly persons, which the Chief Minister said could be the first such initiative in the country. He said that fulfilling a promise made during the prolonged agitation by ASHA workers in front of the Secretariat, the Cabinet approved an increase of Rs 3,000 per month in their honorarium.

2018 Kerala flood survivor 'Ammalu Amma' with the Kerala CM, Rahul and Priyanka after the swearing-in of the Cabinet on Monday —*PTI*

He also announced a monthly hike of Rs 1,000 each for Anganwadi workers and helpers, school cooking staff, pre-primary teachers and ayahs. The Cabinet recommended senior MLA G Sudhakaran as the pro-term Speaker and requested the Governor to convene the Assembly for the swearing-in of MLAs and the election of the Speaker.

> **My priority would be to ensure a happy, peaceful life for the people of Kerala**
>
> -Ramesh Chennithala

AICC Secretary Mansoor Ali Khan with VD Satheesan at the Kerala Chief Minister's swearing-in ceremony at Thiruvananthapuram on Monday—*PTI*

MLAs will be sworn in on 21 May and the Speaker will be elected on 22 May, he said.

The Cabinet approved the constitution of a SIT to reinvestigate a case regarding the alleged assault on two Youth Congress workers during a protest in Alappuzha when the former Chief Minister attended a programme there.

The CM said the Alappuzha district court had ordered reinvestigation on 8 November 2024, but the LDF did not execute the order.

Rejecting allegations of political vendetta, he said the government was implementing court directive. — *PTI*

Congress gave in to IUML and Jamaat: BJP

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

The BJP slammed the Congress after VD Satheesan was sworn in as the Kerala chief minister, alleging that the Congress has "surrendered to Islamists" and is functioning under pressure from the IUML and the Jamaat-e-Islami.

BJP spokesperson Poonawalla alleged the Congress leadership ignored the its MLAs while selecting the CM. In a post on X,Poonawalla said, "Congrats to the first CM of the Jamaat & IUML, VD Satheeshan." Poonawalla also alleged that the Congress government in Kerala is being run by the IUML. — *PTI*

Youth arrested for snatching Ch'garh BJP MLA's phone

RAIPUR, 18 MAY

A 19-year-old bike-borne man allegedly snatched the mobile phone of senior BJP MLA Dharamlal Kaushik during his morning walk in Raipur on Monday, police said. The suspect, Manikant Dhruv, was arrested within eight hours and the stolen phone as well as the motorcycle were recovered, they said. Dhruv, who lives in the Rajiv Nagar area here works occasionally as a bike taxi rider. The Congress had targeted the BJP government over the incident, stating it had occurred during Union Home Minister Amit Shah's visit to the state and called it "a slap on the face of the state's so-called good governance."—*PTI*

— *PTI*

Anbalagan sworn in Puducherry Pro-tem Speaker

PUDUCHERRY, 18 MAY

AIADMK legislator A Anbalagan was sworn in as Pro-tem speaker of the Puducherry Assembly during a ceremony at Lok Niwas. Lt Governor K Kailashnathan administered the oath in Tamil. Chief Minister N Rangasamy, BJP leader A Namassivayam, Minister Malladi Krishna Rao, other legislators, and Chief Secretary Sharat Chauhan attended. Anbalagan, representing Uppalam constituency, will administer the oath to all newly elected members on May 20, when the 16th Assembly convenes. He stated, "The assembly will meet on May 20, and all members will be sworn in." The AIADMK, part of the AINRC-led NDA, contested two seats in April's elections but lost in Orleanspet. —*PTI*

Sena downplays clash with BJP in Thane civic body

THANE, 18 MAY

Shiv Sena claims the recent tension with BJP in Thane Municipal Corporation was due to personal differences, not party conflict. The May 15 general body meeting descended into chaos when BJP corporators opposed the Sena passing 232 resolutions without discussion. Sena leader Hanumant Jagdale said, "One of the alliance partners is playing the role of opposition," adding that "the recent uproar is due to personal differences." Despite prior consensus, some members caused disturbances in the House. Jagdale explained, "Before meetings, key leaders discuss the agenda. Some members created disturbances for reasons known only to them." The dispute is seen as personal, not political.—*PTI*

— *PTI*

Ramesh moves privilege notice against Pradhan

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

Congress Rajya Sabha whip Jairam Ramesh on Monday submitted a privilege notice against Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, alleging he made "derogatory" remarks at a press conference that lowered the dignity of Parliament. The notice was sent to Rajya Sabha Chairman CP Radhakrishnan under Rule 187 of Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business. Ramesh criticised Pradhan's comments on 15 May, during which the minister refused to comment on the Parliamentary Standing Committee's report, stating, "I will speak about the High-Level Committee of Experts." —*PTI*

Bengal to stop stipends for all religious leaders

KOLKATA, 18 MAY

The West Bengal cabinet decided on Monday that assistance-oriented schemes currently in place for Imams, muezzins and purohits would be discontinued from June.

The honorariums under the departments of Information and Cultural Affairs and the Minority Affairs and Madrasa Education for the religious leaders were aimed at supporting their socio-economic standing.

Following a Rs 500 hike in honorarium for religious leaders by the Mamata Banerjee government in March, Imams of registered mosques in WB were granted a monthly stipend of Rs 3,000 while muezzins and purohits were provided Rs 2,000

VANDALS WARNED

Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari declared "zero tolerance" towards vandalism and attacks on police personnel,

warning of the strongest legal action. The warning came a day after protests against an anti-encroachment drive.

PANELS TO PROBE ATROCITIES ON WOMEN

The cabinet approved the formation of two panels under former judges of Calcutta High Court to probe the alleged institutional corruption and atrocities on women and girl children under the TMC admin, Adhikari said.

The panel to probe institutional corruption will be headed by retired Calcutta HC judge Justice Biswajit Basu, with an ADG-rank IPS officer, Jayraman, as member secretary. The panel would examine irregularities in central and state welfare schemes, public construction works and service delivery systems.

He said complaints could be filed by members of the public and agencies involved in public works, and recommendations are expected within 30 days. The other panel, which will investigate atrocities against women and girls, will be chaired by retired judge Justice Samapti Chatterjee, with IPS officer Damayanti Sen as member secretary.

One may recall the Sandeshkhali case where TMC people were accused of gangrape. Many women filed court complaints alleging years of sexual violence. The CBI is still investigating the matter. — *PTI*

Rs 3K monthly dole for women from 1 June

The WB admin okayed the 'Annapurna' scheme providing an allowance of Rs 3,000 per month to women from 1 June, and allowed free travel for them in WBSRTC buses. —*PTI*

CID reopens 59 cases from 2021

The CID has initiated action in connection with complaints about the 2021 post-poll violence, with 458 new inquiries started and 181 fresh FIRs registered. The CID has also reopened 59 cases in which final reports had been submitted. —*PTI*

TMC MLA Mondal's son held

Police have arrested the son of "absconding" TMC MLA Dilip Mondal, along with five others, for allegedly possessing firearms, from the Bakkhali-Fraserganj area of West Bengal. —*PTI*

HC grants TMC's Jahangir Khan protection

The Calcutta High Court on Monday granted TMC's Falta Assembly re-poll candidate Jahangir Khan protection from police action till 26 May in connection with criminal cases filed against him. —*PTI*

India, Sweden unveil tech roadmap, to double trade

GOTHENBURG, 18 MAY

India and Sweden have unveiled a roadmap spanning artificial intelligence, critical minerals, innovation, trade and cultural exchanges during Prime Minister Modi's visit to the country.

Modi and Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson discussed ways to strengthen cooperation. Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden also attended the meeting.

The two leaders also agreed to work towards doubling bilateral trade and investment in the next five years.

India and Sweden launched the "India-Sweden Joint Innovation Partnership 2.0" that envisages a virtual joint science and technology centre and deeper collaboration in areas like artificial intelligence, 6G, quantum computing, critical minerals,

Prime Minister Modi, Sweden's PM Ulf Kristersson and Crown Princess Victoria at the World of Volvo in Gothenburg on Sunday—AP/PTI

renewable energy and smart grid technologies.

The two countries endorsed the development of the India-Sweden Technology and Artificial Intelligence Corridor, aimed at boosting cooperation in AI, digital transformation, innovation and advanced technology partnerships involving industry, start-ups and research institutions.

The two leaders also agreed to strengthen trade facilitation mechanisms, promote the "Make in India" initiative and pursue regular dialogue on intellectual property rights, aiming to double investments within the next five years, the MEA said. — *PTI*

ED NABS AAP LEADER FOR MONEY LAUNDERING

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

The ED on Monday arrested AAP leader Deepak Singla in an alleged money laundering case after searches in Delhi and Goa, officials said.Singla was a candidate of the AAP from the Vishwas Nagar assembly seat in Delhi. He was raided by the ED in 2024 too. The money laundering case is a fallout of a bank loan fraud.

Singla was put under arrest after the searches led to the alleged recovery of incriminating documents, the officials said.

AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal defended party leader Singla after he was arrested by the ED, saying that he is facing the consequences of refusing to join the BJP.

"Singla was not arrested because he did anything wrong. Rather, he was arrested because he was working against the BJP and refused to join the BJP. Deepak is fighting for this country," Kejriwal said in a post on X in Hindi. Kejriwal also praised arrested Punjab minister Sanjeev Arora, calling him "brave and patriotic."

Arora, 62, was arrested by the ED on 9 May from Chandigarh after raids were carried out against him in an alleged Rs 100 crore GST fraud case linked to the sale of mobile phones. — *PTI*

AIADMK veteran Semmalai quits party

CHENNAI, 18 MAY

Veteran AIADMK leader S Semmalai announced his resignation from the party on Monday, citing deep disappointment over the growing internal rift and the lack of opportunities after the demise of chief minister J Jayalithaa.

In his resignation letter, he expressed anguish over recent developments in the party.

"The events that unfolded in the AIADMK since the elections have caused great anguish, a sentiment shared by lakhs of cadres who have dedicated themselves to this movement," he said.

"None of the incidents that have happened or are happening, is satisfactory," he said, asking "Is this the fate of the movement created by MGR and nurtured by Amma (Jayalithaa)?"

According to him, the party's situation has deteriorated to a point where even the media mock the internal fighting.

Alleging that he was sidelined after Jayalalithaa's death, Semmalai said, "I was blocked. However, I continued to work obediently without expressing my feelings."

"Given the current circumstances, my mind does not permit me to continue in the movement," he added.

Semmalai also recalled that late party founder MGR and Jayalalithaa had given him numerous opportunities and helped him rise as a "shining star in the political arena."

"With a heavy heart, I have decided to resign from my position and from the party," he added. — *PTI*

India worried over drone strike near UAE's N-plant

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

India has voiced deep concern over a drone attack targeting the Barakah nuclear facility in the UAE as it marked a dangerous escalation in the West Asia conflict. India's reaction came a day after a drone struck a generator near the UAE's only nuclear power plant, sparking a fire on the complex's perimeter.

No one has claimed responsibility for the attack. The UAE's Ministry of Defence said it is trying to find the source of the drone strike.

The incident triggered fears of a sharp escalation in tensions across West Asia. "India is deeply concerned at the attack on the UAE's Barakah nuclear facility," the MEA said on Monday. — *PTI*

ONLINE SATIRE

'Cockroach Janta Party' gains ground online

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

A satirical online movement called the "Cockroach Janta Party" has exploded across social media after the controversial remarks by CJI Surya Kant sparked outrage and a debate online. The viral campaign gained attention after Mahua Moitra and Kirti Azad joined the digital platform.

The controversy began during a recent court hearing when the CJI referred to certain individuals as "cockroaches" while speaking about people allegedly entering professions with fake credentials. However, many social media users interpreted the remark as one targeting the unemployed. Soon after the comments surfaced, a parody political account named the "Cockroach Janta Party" appeared on X. Branding itself as "a political front of the youth, by the youth, for the youth," the page mixed humour, satire and frustration over unemployment and social issues. Within hours, the account gained traction. The platform calls itself as the "voice of the unemployed."

The controversy began during a recent Supreme Court hearing when the CJI referred to certain individuals as "cockroaches" —*PTI*

- The movement gained political visibility after Mahua Moitra humorously posted on social media website X that she also wanted to join the party

The movement gained political visibility after Mahua Moitra humorously posted on X that she also wanted to join the party. The account responded by welcoming her and calling her "the fighter democracy needs." Kirti Azad also asked about the qualifications needed to join. The account replied that winning the 1983 Cricket World Cup was enough.

The "Cockroach Janta Party" has also gone viral for its unusual membership criteria. Applicants can qualify if they are unemployed "by force, choice, or principle," and capable of "professional ranting." — *PTI*

Vadra withdraws plea against summons

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

Businessman Robert Vadra on Monday unconditionally withdrew his petition in the Delhi High Court challenging a trial court order summoning him in a money laundering case linked to a land deal in Haryana's Shikohpur. Justice Manoj Jain recorded that Vadra's counsel stated the petitioner was not interested in pursuing the case.

The counsel said Vadra would make "appropriate submissions" before the trial court later. The ED had opposed the petition, claiming it was based on a false legal submission, arguing that the offences were not "scheduled offences" under the PMLA at the relevant time. — *PTI*

— ANI

Severe heatwave warning issued in Andhra Pradesh

AMARAVATI, 18 MAY

The Andhra Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority (APSDMA) has issued a severe heatwave warning for multiple mandals on Monday. Severe heatwaves are expected in 28 mandals across Srikakulam, Vizianagaram and Parvathipuram Manyam districts, with heatwave conditions in another 21 mandals. APSDMA Managing Director Prakhar Jain said maximum temperatures could reach between 42°C and 44°C. Districts affected include Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Manyam, NTR, Guntur, Bapatla, Palnadu, Markapuram, Prakasam, Nellore, Kurnool, Nandyal, Anantapur, Kadapa and Tirupati. On Sunday, a maximum of 43.3°C was recorded at Cumbum in Markapuram. Jain advised precautions, including avoiding exposure and consuming fluids like lemon water and buttermilk.—*PTI*

— ANI

Woman's headless body found in box at UP rly station

LUCKNOW, 18 MAY

The headless body of a woman was recovered from a steel box at Gomtinagar railway station, police said. Superintendent of Police (Railways) Rohit Mishra stated that during routine checking, railway staff found a steel box and a bag in coach S1 of the Chhapra-Gomtinagar Express. The box contained a headless female body aged around 25-30, with her hands and legs in the bag. The body has been sent for post-mortem, and efforts are underway to identify her. A case has been registered at Charbagh police station, with three teams formed to investigate the incident.—*PTI*

Kanpur man who killed daughter makes suicide bid

KANPUR, 18 MAY

A 48-year-old man, Shashi Ranjan Mishra, who was jailed for allegedly murdering his twin daughters, attempted suicide inside Kanpur district jail. Mishra slit his throat with a steel plate and was rushed to hospital. Jail Superintendent Rajesh Pandey said Mishra had sharpened his food plate to injure himself. He suffered minor injuries and is stable. Mishra claimed he was suffering from depression and was not receiving treatment, but later alleged fellow inmates attacked him. An inquiry has been ordered. Mishra, from Bihar, was arrested for killing his 11-year-old daughters in April, at their home in Kidwai Nagar.—*PTI*

Sikkim implements vehicle restrictions to save fuel

ANGTOK, 18 MAY

The Sikkim government has introduced an odd-even vehicle restriction to conserve fuel, following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal amid the West Asia crisis. The new rules take effect from 18 May, with City Runner buses operating every 30 minutes on the Ranipool-secretariat route from 7am to 8pm. Public transport will operate on weekends, ensuring mobility. All Sikkim Nationalised Transport buses will continue routes as usual. Taxis remain operational for local and inter-district travel. The state has 15,548 taxis and 6,474 maxi cabs. The measures aim to minimise inconvenience and maintain efficient public transport during the restriction period.—*PTI*

Coaching centre founder arrested in Neet UG leak case

He was part of active paper leak syndicate

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

The CBI has arrested Shivraj Raghunath Motegaonkar who runs the Renukai Chemistry Classes (RCC) in Maharashtra's Latur city in the NEET UG paper leak case, officials said on Monday.

A leaked question paper for the medical entrance exam was found on Motengaonkar' phone mobile during searches conducted by the agency on Sunday. He was arrested after that.

The CBI has alleged that Motegaonkar was an active member of the organised gang involved in the leakage and circulation of the NEET UG paper, the officials said.

Motegaonkar in conspiracy with other accused received the question paper and answers of NEET UG Exam, 2026 ahead of April 23, 2026 exam, they said. He allegedly circulated the paper to several persons.

Shivraj Raghunath Motegaonkar —*PTI*

Meanwhile, a parliamentary panel has decided to review the implementation of reforms in the National Testing Agency (NTA) as well as the NEET-UG 2026 paper leak case and has summoned NTA Chairperson Pradeep Kumar Joshi and other bureaucrats for deliberations.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports will seek the views of top education ministry bureaucrats on the alleged paper leak and reforms of NTA, which holds centralised admission tests to various undergraduate courses, on May 21, a Rajya Sabha notice said.

The agenda includes a review of the implementation of the K Radhakrishnan Committee report on NTA reforms and an update on the investigation into the alleged NEET-UG paper leak case.

The committee, headed by Congress leader Digvijaya Singh, has summoned the Secretary, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Vineet Joshi, and NTA Chairperson Pradeep Kumar Joshi for deliberations. The panel will also deliberate on the impact of AI on education and strategies to enhance students' employability in the country. —*PTI*

APIYO warns of dharna on 22 May against immigration

ITANAGAR, 18 MAY

The Arunachal Pradesh Indigenous Youth Organisation (APIYO) has announced that it will hold a dharna and a rally on 22 May, demanding action against illegal buildings, illegal immigration, and unregulated weekly markets in the Twin Capital Complex of Itanagar and Naharlagun.

APIYO president Taro Sonam asked the government on how many illegal mosques have been demolished so far and how many illegal immigrants have been deported.

He said written assurances were given by the state government earlier, but no action has been taken yet.

The APIYO warned that Arunachal may not remain safe if its demands are ignored. Taro Sonam warned that if the government fails to act, APIYO may call a bandh across Arunachal Pradesh.

He also stated that the movement is not politically driven.

"If Chief Minister Pema Khandu fails to act despite giving written assurance, neither the government nor I will sleep peacefully," Sonam said.

He added that a strong law should be made against illegal immigrants and clarified that he is not against any religion.

APIYO warned that Arunachal may not remain safe if its demands are ignored. x—*SCREENGRAB*

He said the issue is not only a state matter but also a national concern connected to the safety of Arunachal Pradesh.

Sonam said that although corruption exists in the state, APIYO considers illegal immigration a bigger threat.

Meanwhile, Arunachal Pradesh Indigenous Youth Organisation General Secretary Tapor Maying appealed to the government to demolish illegal mosques and protect the land and culture of the state.

Tapor Maying further questioned the Land Department for allegedly allowing land to be used for constructing mosques. The APIYO leader also said that strong G5 materials were used for constructing mosques, making demolition difficult, and said that could not happen without the support from others people in the state. —*Salar News*

Security personnel present during the coordinated release of 28 hostages by Kuki and Naga communities in Senapati on May 15, —*ANI*

Hostages-rescue Ops launched in Manipur

IMPHAL, 18 MAY

Security forces launched operations in Manipur's Kangpokpi district to rescue those who are still being held hostage by armed groups, police said on Monday.

Area domination exercises and search operations are also being carried out in different parts of the hill district to rescue "all missing persons and arrest those responsible for holding hostages", a senior officer said.

Thirty-one of around 38 people belonging to the Kuki and Naga communities, who were held hostage by armed groups in Kangpokpi and Senapati districts, were released on May 14 and 15.

These people were taken to undisclosed locations after suspected militants shot dead three church leaders and injured four others in Kangpokpi on 13 May.

"...combing and search operations were carried out by security forces in the hill ranges to the north west of Leilon Vaiphei and Kharam Vaiphei villages in Kangpokpi district," the police statement said.

Twelve Naga women from Konsakhul village in Kangpokpi and four men and ten women of the Kuki community in Senapati district were handed over to the security forces. —*PTI*

Apex Court refuses to take up PIL on temple priests' wages

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

The Supreme Court on Monday refused to entertain a plea seeking to constitute a judicial commission or an expert committee to review the wages and other benefits given to priests, 'sevadars' and temple staff in state-controlled temples.

A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta said that it cannot entertain the petition under Article 32 of the Constitution and those aggrieved can directly approach the court.

The top court asked petitioner advocate Ashwini Upadhyay not to get into the affairs of priests as he may be unaware about the earnings of priests and 'sevadars' of temples.

Upadhyay said there are judgments of the Allahabad High Court and other high courts which call for reviewing the wages of priests of state-controlled temples to enable them to live a dignified life.

The bench refused to go into the petition and allowed Upadhyay to withdraw the petition with liberty to avail the remedy available under the law.

The plea, filed through advocate Ashwani Dubey, sought directions to the Centre and states to constitute a judicial commission or an expert committee to review the remuneration and other benefits given to priests and temple staff in state-controlled temples.

"Petitioner also seeks a declaration that priests and temple staff are employees under Section 2(k) of the Code on Wages, 2019...," the PIL case stated. —*PTI*

SC grants bail to fake PM's aide

The Supreme Court on Monday granted bail to an accused in a money-laundering case in which he allegedly posed as a close aide of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other Union ministers to extort money for getting people's work done. A bench of Justices MM Sundresh and N Kotiswar Singh set aside the Allahabad High Court order of February 5, refusing bail to Mohammad Kashif, who has been in custody for nearly three years. It granted bail to the accused after he undertook not to use the names of high constitutional functionaries. —*PTI*

Ex-IAS man gets bail in graft case

The Supreme Court on Monday granted bail to retired Chhattisgarh-cadre IAS officer Anil Tuteja in connection with a corruption case involving alleged irregularities in the District Mineral Fund (DMF). A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi took note of the fact that the former bureaucrat was in jail since January 24, 2024 in various corruption cases. Tuteja is accused of receiving huge bribes in the award of contracts under the DMF during his tenure as Joint Director in the Department of Industries in the state. —*PTI*

Tempering in Delhi Bar Council polls: SC stays counting

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

The Supreme Court on Monday stayed the counting of votes for the Bar Council of Delhi (BCD) elections following tampering allegations and asked the Delhi High Court to conduct day-to-hearing on the pleas.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi passed the order while hearing a plea filed by Birender Sangwan and others.

The CJI transferred the matter to a division bench of the high court, urging the Chief Justice to constitute a special bench to hear the dispute on a day-to-day basis.

"Learned counsels for the parties have fairly agreed that since effective adjudication of controversy might require summoning of original records, such as ballot papers etc., it would be apt, if matter is entrusted to a division bench of the Delhi High Court.

"Consequently, we transfer these petitions to the Delhi High Court with a request to the Chief Justice to list the same before a special bench within this week," the bench ordered while putting the counting on hold. —*PTI*

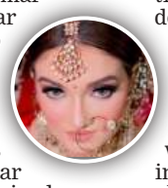
Noida woman kills self, kin says in-laws sought SUV, 50 L

NOIDA, 18 MAY

A 24-year-old woman died allegedly after jumping from the terrace of her three-storey matrimonial house in Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddh Nagar district following harassment by her in-laws over dowry, police said on Monday.

The woman's 26-year-old husband and father-in-law have been arrested, the police said, adding they are investigating the matter even as the woman's family alleged she was killed for dowry by the in-laws.

Deputy Commissioner of Police Shailendra Kumar Singh said a complaint was received at Ecotech-3 police station regarding the death of Deepika, who got married around a year and a half ago to Hrithik, a resident of Jalpura village.



In his complaint, Deepika's father Sanjay Nagar alleged that he received a phone call from his daughter on Sunday afternoon during which she was crying and told him that her in-laws were assaulting her over dowry demands.

He alleged that the in-laws were demanding a Toyota Fortuner SUV and an additional Rs 45-50 lakh in cash as dowry.

In his complaint, Nagar named seven persons who were allegedly present in the house at the time of the incident. Police said efforts were on to arrest the remaining accused named in the complaint. —*PTI*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.

Rajnath Singh in Vietnam, to focus on defence cooperation

HANOI, 18 MAY

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh arrived in Hanoi on Monday, kicking off the Vietnam leg of his two-nation tour aimed at deepening India's strategic and defence partnerships across the Indo-Pacific. L

The visit comes shortly after the state visit of To Lam to New Delhi, signalling growing momentum in bilateral defence ties between the two countries.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh was received at the airport by the Deputy Chief of General Staff of the Vietnam People's Army (VPA), the Ambassador of India to Vietnam, and the Defence Attache at the Indian Embassy in Hanoi. Senior officials from Vietnam's Ministry of National Defence and members of the Indian Embassy were also present on the occasion.

The BrahMos supersonic cruise missile system is expected to figure prominently in the talks, with both sides likely to review progress on a potential supply agreement that has been under discussion for some time.

During his stay, Rajnath Singh is scheduled to hold talks with his Vietnamese counterpart, with discussions expected to cover a broad range of defence and security cooperation issues.

Defence cooperation, military exchanges, defence manufacturing and regional security are expected to remain key focus areas during the visit. —*ANI*

Damaged remains of vehicles after a collision between a van and a truck in Lakhimpur, UP, on Monday —*PTI*

Road crash in Uttar Pradesh leaves 10 dead

LAKHIMPUR KHERI, 18 MAY

Ten people were killed when a van collided head-on with a truck on the Sisaiya-Lakhimpur National Highway on Monday, police said.

The van was going to Sisaiya from Lakhimpur when the accident took place between Unchgaon and Bharehta villages.

Circle Officer of Dhaurahra, Shamsher Bahadur Singh, said all nine passengers travelling in the van and the driver were killed.

District Magistrate of Lakhimpur Kheri, Anjani Kumar Singh, told reporters that the van collided with a truck coming from the opposite direction, leading to nine casualties on the spot, while one succumbed to injuries at the district hospital.

Seven of the deceased have been identified as Jaideep Singh (25), Pawan (23), Sohan (21), Ram Goyal (42), Sahajram (35) and Pappu (18), all residents of the Bahraich district, and Adnan Khan (15), a resident of the Lakhimpur Kheri district, the police said.

Circle Officer, Dhaurahra, Shamsher Bahadur Singh told PTI, "Efforts are on to establish the identity of other deceased persons."

Condoling the loss of lives in the accident, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in a post on X, termed the loss of life in the accident deeply distressing and heart-wrenching. —*PTI*

POLICE NEGLIGENCE BLAMED

2 held in sisters' gangrape case

JODHPUR, 18 MAY

Two persons have been arrested here in connection with alleged rape of two sisters, both of whom committed suicide after repeated police complaints were purportedly ignored.

The younger sister consumed pesticide after climbing a water tank in the village of the accused persons on 15 May, alleging that she and her sister had been repeatedly raped by the accused for years and police had turned a blind eye to their complaints.

In her complaint to police, she alleged that the accused were now sexually assaulting her

and extorting money from her by threatening to circulate videos of her elder sister.

Her elder sister took the extreme step on 20 March.

The younger sister's suicide sparked outrage, triggering protests by her angry family members and villagers. They gathered outside the mortuary and demanded the immediate arrest of all accused and compensation for the family.

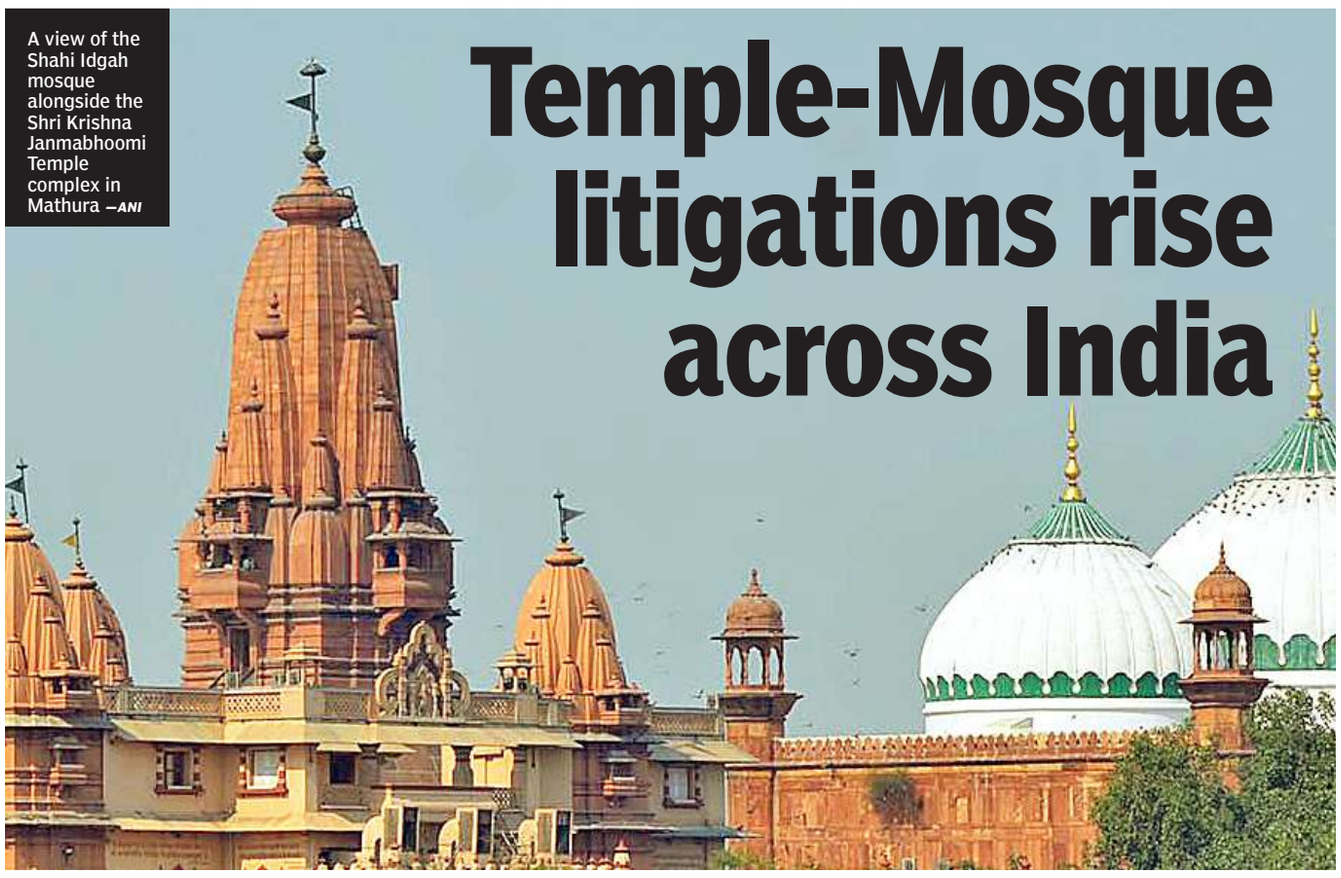
The protesters said that timely action by police could have prevented the two deaths.

Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) (Jodhpur Rural) Bhopal Singh Lakhawat on Monday said two accused have been arrested in the case and are being interrogated.

The two arrested accused are among eight booked in the case based on a complaint lodged by the women's brother. Police said search for the other accused is on. —*PTI*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.

Temple-Mosque litigations rise across India



A view of the Shahi Idgah mosque alongside the Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi Temple complex in Mathura —ANI

The Bhojshala-Kamal Maula Mosque disputed site in Dhar district, which the Madhya Pradesh High Court on Friday ruled is a temple dedicated to Goddess Saraswati, is among the prominent legal cases in the country regarding the religious character of places of worship.

The high court quashed a decades-old order of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) that only allowed the Muslim community to offer Friday prayers at the site while restricting the right of Hindus to worship within the complex.

Apart from the Ayodhya title dispute, in which the Supreme Court order in 2019 led to the building of a Ram temple at the site, here are some of the other similar significant cases.

In most of these, the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, which mandates maintaining the religious character of a place as it existed on 15 August, 1947, has been cited during litigation.

There are over six petitions challenging various provisions of the 1991 law pending adjudication in the top court.

Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Idgah Mosque, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh

The case pertains to a 13.37-acre complex in Mathura that included the Krishna Janmabhoomi temple complex, believed to be Lord Krishna's birthplace, and the Shahi Idgah mosque.

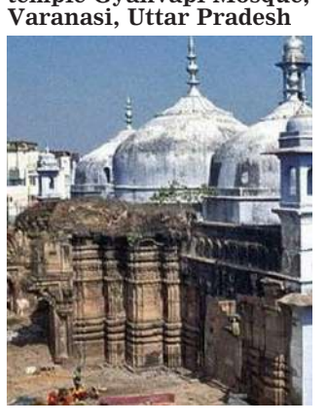
While the Hindu community has claimed that the Shahi Idgah mosque was built over an earlier temple at the birthplace of the deity during Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's reign in the 17th century, the Muslim side has invoked the Places of Worship Act, 1991.

As many as 18 suits filed by the deity's 'next friend', Hindu worshippers and organisations are pending in the Allahabad High Court for possession of the land and restoration of the temple.

On 1 August, 2024, the high court rejected applications of the Muslim side that challenged the maintainability of suits of Hindu worshippers.

In the same order, the court also held that the suits were not barred by the Limitation Act, the Waqf Act and the Places of Worship Act, 1991.

Kashi Vishwanath temple-Gyanvapi Mosque, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh



The dispute surrounding two religious structures, situated adjacent to each other in the holy city of Varanasi, is among the three most high-profile cases along with Ayodhya and Mathura. The Hindu side has claimed that the original Kashi Vishwanath temple was demolished during Aurangzeb's reign and Gyanvapi Mosque was built over it.

The Muslim side has asserted that the dispute is barred by the Places of Worship Act, as they have been praying at the mosque for centuries.

In 2021, five women filed a suit in a Varanasi court seeking permission to offer prayers. A subsequent survey of the site is said to have revealed a "shivling" inside the wazukhana, which the Muslim side claims is part of a fountain mechanism.

In 2022, the Supreme Court protected the spot while also directing that Muslim worshippers' access to the mosque should not be impeded.

In 2024, it also refused to halt a Varanasi court order permitting the offering of daily prayers by a Hindu priest in "Vyas Ji Ka Tahkhana".

Shahi Jama Masjid, Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh

In 2024, Sambhal district became the centre of a controversy after a local court ordered a survey of the Shahi Jama Masjid on a suit by a Hindu devotee alleging that it was built at the site of an ancient Hindu temple.

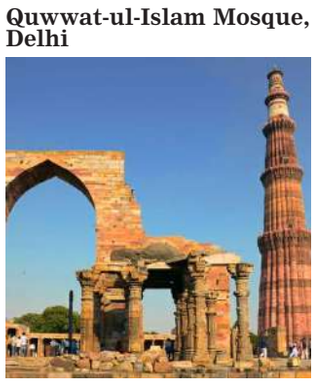
The Hindu side has claimed that the Shahi Jama Masjid was built during Mughal emperor Babur's reign in 1526 after destroying the Harihar temple of Lord Vishnu's final avatar Kalki.

During a second round of the survey, protesting locals clashed with security personnel which led to the death of four.

The Muslim side objected to the survey on the grounds that it was ordered without properly hearing the mosque committee. They also alleged a violation of the Places of Worship Act.

The Supreme Court later directed to maintain the status quo at the disputed site while hearing a special leave petition challenging the Allahabad High Court's refusal to stay the survey proceedings.

Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque, Delhi



Hindu and Jain devotees filed a suit in a civil court in Delhi in 2021 for the restoration of Hindu and Jain deities inside the Qutub Minar complex, claiming that 27 temples were partly demolished by Qutubdin Aibak, a general in the army of Mohamad Gauri, and the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque was raised inside the complex by reusing the material.

The ASI said the mosque was inside the Qutub complex, a protected monument, and no religious worship is permitted.

In 2021, the suit was rejected by the court, saying that past wrongs cannot be the basis for disturbing the peace in the present and future. An appeal before the appellate court is pending.

Idgah Maidan, Hubballi, Karnataka

In 2022, the local authorities allowed Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations at Hubballi Idgah Maidan in Karnataka, which faced opposition from Anjuman-e-Islam.

The Karnataka High Court upheld the order of the Dharwad municipal commissioner, holding that the property belonged to the Dharwad municipality and Anjuman-e-Islam was only a leaseholder for a period of 999 years at a fee of Re 1 per year.

While Anjuman-e-Islam asserted that the maidan was protected under the Places of Worship Act, the high court ruled that it was not a religious place of worship and was allowed for prayers only during Bakrid and Ramzan.

Malali Masjid, Dakshina Kannada, Karnataka

Malali mosque came into the limelight in 2022 after renovation work there was stated to have revealed Hindu-style architectural features within the mosque structure.

Certain Hindu parties moved a local court in Mangaluru, seeking a survey of the structure. The court has held that the suit seeking the appointment of a Commissioner to survey the Malali mosque to ascertain whether it was built on a Hindu temple was maintainable. —PTI

SALAR ساہر

RTI Act: Here's how cricket boards operate internationally

The Central Information Commission (CIC) on Monday held that the BCCI is not a public authority and is therefore exempt from the purview of the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

The Commission ruled that the BCCI cannot be treated as a public authority as it is neither owned, controlled, nor substantially financed by the government.

PTI takes a detailed look at the status of other prominent international cricket boards, and whether they are subject to transparency laws in their respective countries.

- PTI takes a detailed look at the status of other prominent international cricket boards, and whether they are subject to transparency laws in their respective countries.

England & Wales

The ECB is a private, non-profit body, and not legally obliged to disclose internal decisions, policies, and financial records to the public. But some general information regarding players and their backgrounds can be obtained through submitting a Subject Access Request under the Data Protection Act.

Cricket Australia

The Australian cricket governing body is registered as a not for profit limited company, and does not come in the ambit of the nation's Freedom of Information Act — federally or state-wise.

But a corporate transparency culture prevails within CA, and details such as its financial activities are filed with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission. Interested parties can request ASIC to provide those details by raising a request under the FOI Act.

Cricket South Africa

Just like ECB and CA, the South African governing body too is a private and non-profit company and does not fall directly under the South African government's transparency laws.

Instead, the public access to financial, administrative and other miscellaneous records are governed by the Promotion of Access to Information Act.

It's a general act under which South African citizens can request records held by private bodies but the applicants should prove that their request is to exercise or protect any civil rights.

Cricket West Indies

The CWI is an autonomous body independent of government's direct control and does not come under the Islands' right to information laws.

The West Indian board works under a Memorandum of Association, and is accountable to regional cricket boards such as Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Leeward Islands, Antigua etc and the public in general.

The CWI often releases annual reports and financial statements which remain in public domain, but is not legally answerable to a particular query from a private person.

Sri Lanka Cricket

From 2024, the SLC is engaged in a legal tussle in the Court of Appeal to ascertain whether it falls under the country's RTI Act, after the Right to Information Commission held that the governing body is obliged to be transparent.

The Commission held that the SLC is bound by the RTI Act, and that it is established under the relevant law and regulations allowing it to function as the apex regulator of cricket in the country with accountability to the Parliament.

The SLC maintains that it's private body with minimal use of public funds.

Pakistan Cricket Board

The citizens cannot directly seek information under RTI Act from PCB as it is an autonomous body. The PCB maintains that it raises operational funds through media rights, corporate sponsorships, ticket sales, and additionally from the Pakistan Super League.

But PCB releases its financial statements and they are available in public domain and internally the activities of the board are monitored by the country's federal government and the Ministry of Inter Provincial Coordination. —PTI

CIC ruled that the BCCI cannot be treated as a public authority as it is neither owned, controlled, nor substantially financed by the government —PTI

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Vacations cut short, NEET re-exam brings students back to Kota

Medical aspirants are making their way back to the country's coaching capital Kota after the National Testing Agency announced a re-examination for NEET-UG on 21 June following cancellation of 3 May paper —MAGNIFIC

Just days after leaving Kota with the relief of having finished one of India's toughest medical entrance exams, Anamika Verma found herself unpacking her belongings again in the same hostel room she had hoped never to return to.

"I went back to Lucknow after the NEET exam, but returned to Kota because studies don't happen at home... the environment is missing," she said on Monday, as she settled into her room, arranging her books and a study table.

Like Anamika, several medical aspirants are slowly making their way back to Kota, the country's coaching capital, after the National Testing Agency (NTA) announced a re-examination for NEET-UG on 21 June following the cancellation of the 3 May paper.

The return of aspirants to Kota has revived the city's unique student ecosystem -- discipline, structured hostel environment, shared anxiety and relentless preparation.

"The momentum is alive in Kota. The test series has also started, so I came back. Many friends in my circle are returning too," Anamika said.

For many students, the cancellation of the exam did not just disrupt academic plans; it abruptly interrupted a rare moment of relief after years of preparation. And now, they are once again slipping back into routines they had mentally exited weeks ago.

"After giving the NEET paper, we had chilled out and even made travel plans," said Anshika Gureya from Madhya Pradesh. "But as soon as we learned the paper was cancelled, the mood turned off."

Her family had planned a vacation after the exam, something postponed repeatedly during the months of preparation. The trip was cancelled.

"Since Kota is nearby, I have returned to prepare here. I will study from the hostel because that level of focus is not possible at home," she said.

This sentiment is emerging as the biggest reason behind the partial migration back to Kota.

Students say it is not necessarily the coaching classes pulling them back, but the psychological structure of the city itself -- the competitive atmosphere, fixed schedules, late-night discussions, silent libraries and the constant reminder that everyone around them is preparing for the same goal.

Students from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat are among those returning to Kota in noticeable numbers, while aspirants from farther states are continuing preparation from home through online platforms.

For Diksha Pandey from Ranchi, returning for barely a month did not seem practical.

"The target was to appear for the exam, so the routine was set accordingly. We had mentally relaxed after the exam. Then came the news of cancellation," she said. "Going back to Kota for just a month is not practical. So, I am preparing from Jharkhand online. It is challenging because the environment at home is not the same."

She admitted that restarting preparation after mentally winding down has been emotionally exhausting for many students.

"Everyone was mentally prepared for the exam, and then to relax. After a gap of several days, hearing about the re-exam is stressful. We had been preparing non-stop before the exam; getting back to that intense routine is tough," she said.

Diksha also pointed out uncertainty about the paper's difficulty levels.

"The 2025 paper was tough, and 2026 seemed a bit easier, but now it feels like the re-exam will be tough again. That is also a cause of stress," she added.

Hostel owners in Kota say the city is witnessing a gradual increase in enquiries and student returns, particularly from neighbouring states.

A senior member of a hostel association said around 1.2 lakh students prepare in Kota annually, with nearly half focused on NEET.

"Many who had left after the exam and are from neighbouring states are returning. Those from distant states are mostly studying from home," he said.

ALLEN Career Institute has announced free academic support for all students appearing for the reexamination, including online score booster classes, NEET-pattern tests and expert analysis sessions.

"Under this initiative, score booster classes are being conducted online from 9 am to 12 pm daily. NEET-pattern tests are held from 2 pm to 5 pm, followed by a detailed analysis by experts. This is the daily routine," said Vinod Kumawat, President of ALLEN Career Institute, Kota.

He said students from nearby states and Rajasthan, especially those whose exam centres are in and around Kota, have already begun arriving.

"The biggest advantage of coming here is access to doubt-clearing sessions and counselling with faculty members. There is no regular classroom activity, but the hostel environment gives them a different atmosphere from home," Kumawat said.

"This environment is the main reason why students from nearby areas are returning to hostels for studies."

Kumawat added that students already enrolled for the next NEET cycle have stayed back in Kota, while aspirants from far-off states are depending on online support.

"We started free online classes for every NEET aspirant. Because time is short, this was the best option. If we had two or more months, we could have designed a full course, but in this limited time, daily structured support is most effective," he said.

Teachers say the coaching ecosystem has become far more adaptable than before, with the help of online classes.

"Online systems have evolved significantly and are providing strong support," said Manoj Sharma, a mathematics faculty member at another coaching institute in Kota.

"But since it is only a matter of a month, most students are preparing from home rather than travelling back," he added.

In hostel rooms, once temporarily abandoned after the exam, study lamps are glowing again, and conversations have shifted back from holiday plans to mock tests and cut-offs.

"We had made travel plans and bookings for May-June, which had to be cancelled," said Anshika Verma, another student from Uttar Pradesh who has returned to Kota.

For students like Anshika, the city has once again become a place where ambition, pressure, disappointment and hope coexist in hostel rooms and study halls. —PTI

Iranian Nobel winner Narges back from hospital

DUBAI, 18 MAY

Iranian Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi, aged 54, has been discharged from a hospital in Tehran after more than two weeks, supporters announced Monday. They urged Mohammadi to stay at home for follow-up care and physiotherapy. She was urgently transferred from prison to a hospital in northwestern Iran on 1 May after falling unconscious. Mohammadi was released on bail nearly 10 days later and moved to a Tehran hospital for specialist assessment. She was awarded the Nobel in 2023 while imprisoned and has faced repeated incarceration. Her latest arrest was in December in Mashhad. Her family said her health had worsened in prison, partly due to heavy beating during arrest. —*PTI*

Pope, Anthropic to launch pontiff's AI encyclical on 15 May

NAIROBI, 18 MAY

Pope Leo XIV and Anthropic co-founder Christopher Olah will jointly launch the pontiff's first encyclical, a formal papal letter setting out Church teaching on major issues, on 25 May, focusing on human dignity in the era of artificial intelligence, the Vatican said. The document, 'Magnifica Humanitas', reflects the Pope's growing concern over AI, particularly its use in warfare, and calls for stronger oversight of emerging technologies. Its launch is expected to become a flashpoint with the Trump administration amid tensions over AI regulation and military applications. The encyclical, signed on May 15, draws parallels with Rerum Novarum by Pope Leo XIII, linking the Industrial Revolution to today's AI transformation. —*PTI*

Trump warns 'clock is ticking' for Iran as peace deal stalled

Trump posts AI images and videos of American military strikes on Iran

WASHINGTON DC, 18 MAY

US President Donald Trump has intensified pressure on Iran, warning that "the clock is ticking" as ceasefire negotiations between Washington and Tehran remain stalled amid rising tensions across West Asia.

In a dramatic escalation of rhetoric, Trump launched a barrage of artificial intelligence-generated images and videos on his social media platform, Truth Social, depicting American military strikes on Iran. The posts appeared shortly after he issued a blunt warning to Tehran over the deadlocked talks.

"For Iran, the Clock is Ticking, and they better get moving, FAST, or there won't be anything left of them. TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE!" Trump wrote.

Images posted by the US President included an AI-generated map of the West Asia with an American flag overlaying the region and multiple arrows pointing towards Iran from all directions. Another visual showed Trump in orbit under the caption "Space Force", alongside depictions of military space command centres, satellite warfare scenarios, and him pressing a red button, suggesting futuristic command of space-based military operations (**in pic**).

He later shared AI-generated videos showing US aircraft carriers destroying Iranian drones under his command, along with audio clips describing simulated military operations. The online campaign further included surreal visuals of Trump leading robotic armies beneath a "United States Space Force" emblem.

Trump also posted comparative graphics targeting former presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden. One image contrasted Iranian vessels operating freely during the Obama-Biden administrations with destroyed boats labelled "Trump", while another captioned "Bye Bye Fast Boats" depicted an American drone striking Iranian vessels.

Observers described the digital campaign as signalling heightened threats of US military action as diplomatic efforts falter.

Meanwhile, Iran said indirect negotiations with the United States were continuing through Pakistani mediation. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei said Tehran had exchanged proposals and "corrective points" with Washington, adding that talks were ongoing and "not temporary".

Baghaei reiterated that Iran would not compromise on its nuclear rights under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), particularly uranium enrichment.

Amid the standoff, regional tensions have further escalated after reports that US cargo planes carrying ammunition from Germany landed in Tel Aviv, raising concerns over preparations for a possible renewed military escalation in the region. —*Salar News*

China will not provide material support to Iran: US

WASHINGTON, 18 MAY

US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer has said President Donald Trump secured a commitment from China not to "provide material support to Iran" during high-level talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping, amid escalating tensions in West Asia.

Speaking to ABC News, Greer said Trump did not seek Beijing's direct involvement in reopening the Strait of Hormuz, but instead focused on ensuring China stayed out of the conflict.

Greer noted that China had "a clear interest" in reopening the strategic waterway, which remains crucial for global energy supplies.

TRADE AND INVESTMENT TALKS

Although Trump claimed tariffs were not discussed directly with Xi, Greer confirmed that lower-level negotiations had taken place ahead of the leaders' summit. The two countries agreed in principle to establish separate "Board of Trade" and "Board of Investments" mechanisms to address trade disputes and market-access issues.

China also pledged to address US supply chain shortages by easing restrictions on and critical minerals like neodymium, yttrium, scandium, and indium

China's President Xi Jinping with US President Donald Trump held talks in Beijing on 15 May —*PTI*

- US said China had agreed to review biotechnology trade restrictions and purchase 200 Boeing aircraft, though Beijing has not publicly confirmed the claims.

The US cleared 10 Chinese firms to purchase Nvidia's second-most advanced semiconductor chips.

AGRICULTURAL DEALS

The White House also announced that China would increase imports of US agricultural goods, including beef and poultry, at an annualised rate of USD 17 billion between 2026 and 2028. China will restore market access for US beef and resume poultry imports from bird flu-free American states.

The measures are expected to provide relief to American farmers hit by the US-China trade war. According to US Department of Agriculture data, Chinese imports of US agricultural products fell from USD 38 billion in 2022 to USD 8 billion in 2025, with soybean purchases dropping sharply during the same period.

Greer said China had agreed to review biotechnology trade restrictions and purchase 200 Boeing aircraft, though Beijing has not publicly confirmed the claims. —*PTI*

7,000 EVACUATED, 2 KILLED AS 5.2 QUAKE ROCKS CHINA

BEIJING, 18 MAY

A 5.2 magnitude earthquake struck south China's Guangxi region early Monday, killing two people, toppling buildings and triggering the evacuations of thousands, state media reported.

Four others were injured, while more than 7,000 residents were evacuated from Liuzhou city.

The search for several missing residents wrapped up around midday Monday, after the last trapped person,

a 91-year-old man, was found alive in good condition, authorities said.

Images aired by state broadcaster CCTV showed excavators clearing debris. At least 13 buildings collapsed, while landslides triggered by the quake blocked roads to the area, according to CCTV.

Train services around Liuzhou were cancelled or delayed. Earthquakes occasionally strike south China, with more intense ones usually occurring toward the mountainous west or the east, toward Taiwan.

The most devastating recent earthquake with a magnitude of 7.9 occurred in Sichuan in 2008, leaving more than 87,000 dead or missing. —*PTI*

NAVY JETS COLLIDE IN US

Two US Navy EA-18G Growlers collided and crashed during an air show at Mountain Home Air Force Base in Idaho on Sunday, forcing all four crew members to eject safely. Officials said the aircrafts, from Electronic Attack Squadron 129 in Washington, were performing an aerial demonstration when they made contact mid-air before plunging to the ground in flames. The crew members were reported stable and no injuries occurred on the ground. The air show was cancelled after the crash —*PTI*

Israel stops flotilla trying to breach Gaza blockade

ANKARA, 18 MAY

The Israeli military began intercepting the latest flotilla attempting to break the Gaza blockade on Monday.

Around 50 vessels departed from the port of Marmaris in Turkiye last week in what the organisers of the Global Sumud Flotilla described as the final leg of their journey to Gaza.

The organisation's livestream on Monday showed activists aboard vessels putting on life jackets and raising their hands before a boat carrying troops approached. Israeli troops boarded the ship, and the livestream ended. Many of the ships are currently off the coast of Cyprus.

Other footage showed Israeli troops on speedboats approaching and asking the activists to move to the boat's front.

An hour before the interception, Israel's Foreign Ministry called on activists to "change course and turn back immediately."

"Once again, a provocation for the sake of provocation: another so-called "humanitarian aid flotilla" with no humanitarian aid," the Foreign Ministry posted on X. The Israeli military declined comment on the operation.

Organisers said the boats were intercepted 250 nautical miles from Gaza. Unlike previous interceptions, which took place at night, the Israeli military boarded the boats in broad daylight. —*PTI*

Brahui poet's killing sparks alarm in Balochistan

BALOCHISTAN, 18 MAY

Renowned Brahui-language poet, author and academic, Professor Ghamkhwar Hayat, was shot dead near his residence in Balochistan's Noshki district.

The killing has sparked outrage among rights organisations, political activists and literary circles, who linked the incident to the worsening security and human rights situation in the province, reports 'The Balochistan Post.'

'The Balochistan Post,' said local sources stated that unidentified gunmen opened fire on Hayat in the Killi Mengal area near his home. The attackers were allegedly associated with a state-backed armed network referred to in the region as a "death squad."

Professor Hayat, whose real name was Mohammad Khan, served as an assistant professor at the Government Boys Degree College Noshki.

Widely respected in Brahui literary circles, he authored around 20 books and earned recognition as a poet, translator, fiction writer and essayist.

Hayat had been placed on Pakistan's Fourth Schedule under the Anti-Terrorism Act, a list that subjects individuals to strict monitoring and restrictions.

Meanwhile, Pakistani security forces killed 35 terrorists and captured three senior commanders during an operation in Balochistan's Mangla Zarghoon Ghar area. —*ANI*

THE VIRUS THREAT

CONGO OPENS 3 MORE EBOLA TREATMENT CENTRES IN ITURI

DAKAR, 18 MAY

The Congolese health minister announced the opening of three treatment centres in the Ituri region in eastern Congo on Sunday as he visited the region now facing an Ebola outbreak.

"We know the hospitals are already under stress," said Samuel Roger Kamba, the health minister, while visiting Bunia, the capital and largest city in Ituri. "But we are preparing to have treatment centres at all three sites."

The World Health Organisation declared the Ebola disease outbreak a global public health emergency on Sunday, after around 300 suspected cases and 88 deaths in Congo and two in Uganda.

Although the outbreak is centred in Ituri, cases have been reported in capital, Kinshasa, and in Goma, the largest city in eastern Congo.

In another statement on X on Sunday, the WHO Regional Office said that a team of 35 WHO experts and the Congolese Ministry of Health had arrived in Bunia, the capital of Ituri, along with 7 tons of medical supplies and equipment.

Ebola is highly contagious and can be contracted via bodily fluids like vomit, blood, or semen. The disease it causes is rare, but severe and often fatal. — *PTI*

HANTAVIRUS-HIT CRUISE SHIP DOCKS IN NETHERLANDS

ROTTERDAM, 18 MAY

The cruise ship hit by the hantavirus outbreak has docked at the Dutch port of Rotterdam for disinfection, ending a troubled journey that put international health authorities on alert.

The MV Hondius was carrying 25 crew members and two medical personnel as it reached Rotterdam on Monday, after all the passengers disembarked elsewhere.

An Associated Press journalist saw occupants wearing masks on the deck as the boat was escorted through the port by a tug boat and a Dutch police boat. Authorities say that the crew will enter immediate quarantine.

During the outbreak, three passengers who had been aboard the ship died, including a Dutch couple who health officials believe were the first exposed to the virus while visiting South America.

The MV Hondius has spent the past six days sailing from the Canary Islands, where the remaining passengers were escorted off the vessel by personnel in full-body protective gear and boarded flights to more than 20 countries to enter quarantine.

The outbreak on the ship has reached at least 11 cases, nine of which have been confirmed. — *PTI*

Starmer 'fighting on' with no departure in sight: UK DyPM

LONDON, 18 MAY

Prime Minister Keir Starmer will fight on without setting a timetable for his departure, one of his most loyal Cabinet allies insisted as he urged Labour to "stop its self-goals" after a week of internal strife.

In a warning to colleagues, the PM's deputy, David Lammy, said the Labour would lose the next general election if the "internecine warfare" continued.

Speaking to broadcasters on Monday, Lammy insisted he would "100%" be campaigning for Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham in the Makerfield by-election, which he will need to contest and win to mount a challenge for No 10.

"Let me be clear, Keir Starmer remains the most resilient person I know in my life," he added.

Mr Lammy said Labour had scored a "spectacular own goal" in the last 10 days after a local election mauling that prompted mounting calls for the Prime Minister's resignation.

"Now is the time to stop the own goals, to get on the pitch, to pass the ball amongst ourselves, to play in the right direction, to score some goals on behalf of the British public," he told Sky News. — *Agencies*

'ALL WILL BE FORGIVEN'

Leaked cable fuels claim of US role in Imran's ouster

ISLAMABAD/ WASHINGTON DC, 18 MAY

A leaked diplomatic cable has reignited allegations that the United States played a role in the removal of former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan through a no-confidence vote in April 2022.

According to a report by Drop Site, the classified cypher details a March 2022 meeting between Pakistan's then ambassador to Washington, Asad Majeed Khan, and senior US diplomat Donald Lu.

During the discussion, Lu allegedly suggested ties between Islamabad and Washington would improve if Khan were removed through the parliamentary process, warning Pakistan risked "isolation" from the US and Europe should he survive the vote.

The cable reportedly quoted Lu as saying: "If the no-confidence vote against the Prime Minister succeeds, all will be forgiven in Washington."

Events leading to Khan's ouster reportedly began in June 2021, when then CIA director William J Burns travelled to Islamabad seeking a meeting with Khan.

Reports said the meeting never occurred after Khan insisted on speaking only with his official counterpart, US President Joe Biden, who had allegedly declined repeated requests for direct talks.

The report also claimed Washington was frustrated after failing to secure Pakistani territory for drone bases following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Khan's visit to Moscow on the day Russia invaded Ukraine further strained ties.

Drop Site alleged Pakistan's military establishment separately engaged with Washington in 2021 before Khan's removal and jail, and later aligned more closely with US strategic interests, including covert ammunition supplies for Ukraine.

It further claimed IMF support for Pakistan was quietly linked to continued military cooperation.

Washington has repeatedly denied Khan's allegations of foreign interference, insisting no evidence has been produced to substantiate the claims. —*Salar News*

NSE commences live trading in Gold Receipts

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

The National Stock Exchange (NSE) on Monday said it has commenced live trading in Electronic Gold Receipts (EGRs), marking a move towards developing a regulated spot gold market in the country. In a statement, the bourse said it has received an encouraging response to the Electronic Gold Receipts product from market participants and the broader ecosystem. At present, vaulting and collection centres are operational in Ahmedabad and Mumbai. Four additional centres in Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai and Bengaluru have been activated from Monday. NSE said it plans to expand the network in a phased manner to as many as 120 centres across the country, however a time based plan has not yet been shared. Electronic Functioning as the digital equivalent of physical gold, Electronic Gold Receipts are sophisticated financial instruments backed by actual gold deposits maintained by Sebi-registered vault managers. Allowing individuals to trade their gold holdings digitally on stock exchanges with greater ease. —*PTI*

United Breweries to close brewery unit in Ludhiana

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

United Breweries Ltd on Monday announced that its Ludhiana brewery would be closed from 30 June under a long-term capacity lease agreement with a contract brewing unit. The company has decided to close its brewery unit at C/60, Focal Point, Ludhiana 141010, Punjab, effective from 30 June, United Breweries Ltd (UBL) said in a regulatory filing. "We have entered into a long-term capacity lease agreement with a contract brewing unit to secure supplies of the company's beer in Punjab and nearby states, including Delhi," it said. UBL said this long-term lease will play a pivotal role in meeting future demand efficiently through enhanced operations within Punjab. —*PTI*

'Fertiliser subsidy for FY27 may rise by ₹70,000 cr'

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

India's fertiliser subsidy bill for 2026-27 may rise by Rs 70,000 crore to Rs 2.41 lakh crore because import costs amid the West Asia crisis, a senior official said on Monday. Aparna S Sharma, Additional Secretary, Department of Fertilisers, said, "The subsidy bill will go up, but what percentage is something I cannot say." Asked whether the increase could reach Rs 70,000 crore, she replied, "Maybe." The fertiliser subsidy allocation for 2026-27 is Rs 1.71 lakh crore. Sharma said fertiliser availability for the kharif season remained "comfortable", with stocks at 200.9 lakh tonne. India has diversified imports, secured DAP and NPK supplies, and continues weekly subsidy payments through the Integrated Fertilizer Management System despite ongoing regional supply concerns. —*PTI*

Arohan Financial files IPO; eyes ₹600 crore

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

Microfinance institution Arohan Financial Services has filed preliminary papers with market regulator Sebi to raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO), comprising a fresh issue of shares worth Rs 600 crore. Proceeds from the fresh issue will be used to boost the company's capital base and for general corporate purposes, the draft papers filed last week showed. Earlier in January, Arohan Financial Services Managing Director Manoj Kumar Nambiar stated that the company is looking to raise Rs 1,500 crore through its maiden public offering. The filing comes after the successful listings of Aye Finance and Kissht in 2026. DAM Capital Advisors, Motilal Oswal Investment Advisors and SBI Capital Markets are managing the issue. —*PTI*

Mkts up marginally after intraday volatility

Sensex up by 77.05 pts; Nifty by 6.45 pts

MUMBAI, 18 MAY

Sensex and Nifty ended marginally higher on Monday, supported by value buying in IT and select blue-chip counters, despite sharp intraday losses. A weak rupee and rising global crude prices amid escalating West Asia tensions capped gains, traders said.

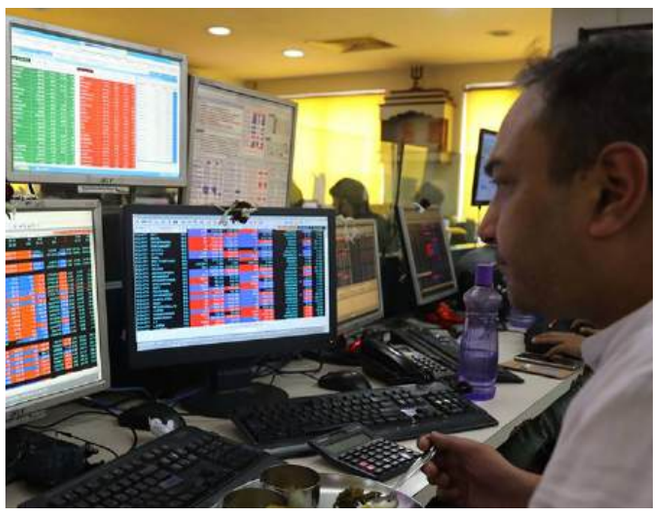
In an extremely volatile trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex increased by 77.05 points, or 0.10 per cent, to settle at 75,315.04. During the day, it tanked 1,134.78 points, or 1.50 per cent, to 74,180.26.

A total of 3,034 stocks declined while 1,264 advanced and 194 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Among the sectoral indices, BSE Focused IT jumped 2.53 per cent, while IT, Healthcare, and Telecommunication rose by 1.95 per cent, 0.22 per cent, and 0.05 per cent, respectively.

From the Sensex firms, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, Bharti Airtel, Bajaj Finserv, Sun Pharma, HCL Tech, Bajaj Finance and Tata Consultancy Services were among the major winners. In contrast, Tata Steel, Power Grid, State Bank of India and NTPC were major laggards.

As for the 50-share NSE Nifty, it also edged higher by 6.45 points, or 0.03 per cent, to end at 23,649.95.



Rising crude oil prices, continued weakness in the rupee near record lows, and sustained FII outflows continued to weigh on the market –*FREEPIK*

"However, the upside remained limited as rising crude oil prices, continued weakness in the rupee near record lows, and sustained FII outflows continued to weigh on the market," Gaurav Garg, Research Analyst at Lemonn Markets Desk, said.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, traded 0.73 per cent higher at USD 110.1 per barrel. The Indian rupee extended its losing streak for the seventh straight session, weakening even further to close at a record low of 96.35 against the US dollar on Monday.

In the previous session on Friday, the Sensex dropped 160.73 points, or 0.21 per cent, to settle at 75,237.99.

The Nifty settled lower by 46.10 points, or 0.19 per cent, at 23,643.50, snapping its two-day gaining streak. —*PTI*

INTRADAY LOW OF 96.39

Rupee settles at record low of 96.35 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 18 MAY

The Indian rupee weakened to a record low of 96.35 on Monday, with forex traders citing simmering US-Iran tensions and a strong dollar as dampening global market sentiment.

Emerging market economies, including India, face additional pressure from rising crude oil prices and elevated interest rates, both of which are driving dollar outflows — compounding existing FPI-led withdrawals, traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 96.19 before falling to an intraday low of 96.39, and closed at 96.35 — down 54 paise from its previous close. On Friday, the rupee had breached the 96/USD mark for the first time before closing at a then-record low of 95.81.

Traders expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias amid a strong dollar, rising US treasury yields, geopolitical tensions, and FII outflows. "However, RBI intervention and restrictions on gold and silver imports may support the rupee at lower levels. The USDINR spot price is expected to trade in the range of 96 to 96.60," said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Commodities Research, Mirae Asset Sharekhan.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength, was trading at 99.14, down 0.14 per cent due to simmering Iran tensions. As Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading up 0.65 per cent at USD 109.97 per barrel in futures trade.

Meanwhile, within days of levying high duties on precious metals, the government on Saturday imposed import curbs on silver by putting the metal under a licensed regime for inbound shipments. —*PTI*

Experts warn rupee may slide to 100 soon

Experts warn the Indian rupee could remain under pressure, potentially falling to 100 against the US dollar within a quarter. Rising crude oil prices, persistent foreign investor outflows and geopolitical tensions are key factors. The rupee has depreciated 6 per cent to 7 per cent this year, from near 89 to over 96, causing concern in markets. Experts noted the sharp decline since 11 May, with Rs 2.65 lakh crore withdrawn by FIIs in 2026. Market expert Ajay Suresh Kedia highlighted strong dollar demand, high energy prices, and US bond yields as drivers of weakness, predicting the rupee will trade between 91.70-92.00 and 98.60-99.50 over six months. Former UN advisor Santosh Mehrotra warned that if pressures persist, the rupee could very easily touch Rs 100.

FCI to raise ₹50,000 cr as short-term loans

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

The Food Corporation of India (FCI) is set to raise short-term loans of Rs 50,000 crore from scheduled banks for a three-month tenure, with a green shoe option to mop up Rs 25,000 crore, a senior government official said on Monday.

The funds will bridge cash flow mismatches arising from procurement and distribution of foodgrains.Tenders will be opened on 22 May.

Total borrowings under the tender will not exceed Rs 75,000 crore at any point of time, the official added.

The short-term loans will be on an unsecured basis. Notably, the government guarantee of Rs 6,000 crore available for food credit to FCI will not be extended to these borrowings. As per the tender, offers must remain valid up to 31 August, with loan disbursed in tranches.

FCI, the government's nodal foodgrain procurement and distribution agency, is in peak wheat procurement season. —*PTI*

OVERTAKES HDFC BANK

Airtel rises to 2nd most valued Indian firm

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

Bharti Airtel has overtaken HDFC Bank, becoming the second most valued Indian company after its shares rose up to 2 per cent on Monday. Moneycontrol reported that Airtel traded at Rs 1,953.8 apiece, taking the market capitalisation to nearly Rs 12 lakh crore.

Airtel's upward momentum continued throughout the week, recording a 10 per cent gain, while HDFC Bank shares increased by only 1 per cent during the same period. This performance paralleled a 15.6 per cent year-on-year jump in Airtel's revenue from operations, which reached Rs 55,383.2 crore in Q4 FY26, up from Rs 47,876.2 crore a year earlier.

However, despite Bharti Airtel's rising market value and revenue growth, the company reported a 33.5 per cent decline in consolidated net profit to Rs 7,325 crore for the January-March quarter of FY26, compared to Rs 11,021.8 crore in the year-ago period.

Airtel's India revenue grew 7.7 per cent year-on-year to Rs 39,566 crore, while mobile revenue rose 8.3 per cent, led by higher realisations and an expanding customer base.

Bharti Airtel plans to set up 56 edge data centres over the next 18-24 months as part of its plan to scale up business in the segment, a top company official said on Thursday.

Bharti Airtel VP Gopal Vittal, during the company's earnings call for the fourth quarter of FY26, said the company will focus on investing in data centres, strengthening the optical fibre cable network and scaling up recently announced non-banking financial services, in which the company has Rs 20,000 crore investment. —*Agencies*

JSW Energy sells 2.5 cr JSW steel shares for ₹3,150 cr via bulk deal

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

JSW Energy on Monday announced the sale of 2.5 crore equity shares in JSW Steel for Rs 3,150 crore through a bulk deal on the National Stock Exchange of India Ltd. Post-transaction, the company's balance holding is 4,50,38,350 equity shares of JSW Steel Ltd, a regulatory filing said.

According to the filing, the company has divested 2,50,00,000 equity shares (face value Re 1 each) of JSW Steel Ltd through a bulk deal on the National Stock Exchange of India Ltd on May 18, as part of a strategic liquidity release, realising gross proceeds of Rs 3,150 crore.

The monetisation of a part of the shareholding in JSW Steel Ltd not only releases capital for pursuing the company's growth strategy but also improves return on capital employed, reinforcing the company's commitment to disciplined capital allocation and long-term value creation for shareholders, it added. —*PTI*

Tata, Bhutan's Druk Green collab on clean energy

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

Tata Power announced an agreement with Druk Green Power Corporation (DGPC) to establish a training framework aimed at developing 5,000 MW of clean energy capacity in Bhutan.

The training programmes will be delivered through Tata Power Skill Development Institute (TPSDI). Praveer Sinha, CEO of Tata Power, said the partnership reflects their shared vision of creating a future-ready talent ecosystem for Bhutan's expanding clean energy sector.

Dasho Chhewang Rinzin, MD of DGPC, described the MoU as a step to bolster local capabilities crucial for the ongoing project to develop 5,000 MW of clean energy.

TPSDI was founded to address skill gaps in the power sector by offering industry-relevant, training and certification programmes.

It operates a comprehensive training network across India, providing hands-on training across thermal, hydel, solar, wind, and green hydrogen technologies. The MoU was signed by Sinha and Rinzin. —*PTI*

SEBI CHIEF AFFIRMS INDIAN MKTS' RESILIENCE

BHUBANESWAR, 18 MAY

SEBI Chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey stated on Monday that despite increased volatility due to the ongoing West Asia conflict, Indian markets have the capacity to "absorb different types of shocks".

Speaking at the Regional Investors Seminar for Awareness, Pandey explained that the West Asia crisis has impacted global oil supply and prices, causing inflationary risks and spillover effects.

However, he emphasised that a resilient Indian market can resume its normal trajectory after shocks.

Pandey acknowledged some foreign portfolio outflows since 2024 but highlighted that domestic investors have "retained their confidence".

Pandey also noted that 'finfluencers' must register with Sebi, which has removed 1.4 lakh content from social media.

He announced plans to open a Sebi office in Bhubaneswar and for Odisha to consider municipal bonds for urban development. —*PTI*

Gold steady at Rs 1.62 lakh, silver rises higher to Rs 2.76 lakh

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

Gold prices remained flat at Rs 1.62 lakh per 10 grams on Monday, while silver prices edged higher to Rs 2.76 lakh per kilogram following fresh restrictions on imports of the white metal and weakness in the rupee. According to the All India Sarafa Association, silver appreciated by Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,76,000 per kilogram, from Friday's closing level of Rs 2,75,000 per kilogram.

Gold of 99.9 per cent purity remained unchanged at Rs 1,62,800 per 10 grams. Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst at HDFC Securities, said domestic bullion prices remained resilient after a sharp sell-off in the previous session. He said losses in local gold prices were limited as the rupee weakened further to a record low of around 96.37 against the US dollar.

"The move is expected to lower silver imports and tighten domestic availability, which could lead to higher premiums in the local market," Gandhi added on the government's restrictions on silver imports. In the global market, spot gold traded lower at USD 4,535.23 per ounce, while silver fell nearly one per cent to USD 75.42 per ounce.

Praveen Singh of Mirae Asset ShareKhan said stronger dollar, oil prices and rising global bond yields increased gold prices. Investors also monitored US-Iran and rupee-dollar market volatility. —*PTI*

'CBRN' THREATS LOOM

India vulnerable to cyberattacks, warns report

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

India's geopolitical vulnerabilities, growing industrial sector, and urbanisation have heightened its susceptibility to cyberattacks and Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) threats, said a report released on Monday, noting the need to strengthen CBRN security strategy.

The CBRN defence measures report was unveiled at a PHDCCI conference in Delhi. Roli Singh, Chair, National Authority Chemical Weapons Convention, said while at the report launch event.

"Strengthening the CBRN security strategy is increasingly urgent, as regional tensions escalate," the report suggests that the CBRN threat landscape is not static but dynamic, adaptive, and technology-enabled.

–*FREEPIK*

For India, meeting this challenge requires a preparedness posture that matches the pace and complexity of evolving threats. This demands investment, coordination, innovation, and above all, a sustained commitment to collaboration across the full ecosystem of national security stakeholders, says the report.

"The Ukraine conflict demonstrates that chemical agents, including industrial chemicals not traditionally classified as "chemical warfare agents", can be rapidly weaponised at scale in modern conflict. India's doctrine, detection systems, and protective equipment must account for this expanded threat spectrum, including drone-dispersed," the report stated.

It noted that the Indian industry has capacity to develop world-class CBRN detection systems, protective equipment, robotics platforms, bio-surveillance tools, and AI-based threat analytics.

Flagging the potential threat of cyber attacks targeting sensitive industrial systems and causing serious accidents, a senior official called for deepening collaboration between the government and the industry. —*PTI*

IJMA seeks Bengal govt's help over jute supply crisis

KOLKATA, 18 MAY

Amid an acute shortage of raw material and spiralling prices, jute millers in West Bengal are seeking the new BJP government's intervention to avert large-scale mill closures and job losses, industry sources said.

At least 14 mills across the Hooghly industrial belt have either suspended operations or are facing severe disruptions due to the non-availability of raw jute and unviable costs, according to Indian Jute Mills Association (IJMA).

According to the millers' estimates, around 75,000 workers are already facing "involuntary unemployment" because of partial shutdowns, curtailed production and irregular operations across North 24 Parganas and Hooghly districts. Millers hope that the new government will act for the "release of residual stocks, permission for emergency imports and restoration of a viable price corridor to support mills where two lakh workers are engaged". In four months, raw jute benchmark rates surged from Rs 11,600 to Rs 17,100 per quintal, over three times the Rs 5,650 MSP. —*PTI*

No HC relief, Phogat may miss Asian Games trials

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

The Delhi High Court on Monday refused to grant immediate relief to wrestler Vinesh Phogat "without hearing the other side" after she sought a direction permitting her to take part in the May 30-31 selection trials for this year's Asian Games.

The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) had declared her "ineligible" to take part in the WFI events till June 26.

The court, however, permitted Phogat to give a "comprehensive reply" to the WFI's show-cause notice to her over accusations of indiscipline and anti-doping rule violations.

Justice Purushaindra Kumar Kaurav directed the WFI to take the show-cause notice to "its logical conclusion" by July 6 and place its decision before it.

The judge issued a notice to the WFI, the Centre and the Indian Olympic Association on Phogat's petition over her "ineligibility", and said a balance must be maintained between the "competing interests" in this case.

The senior counsel representing Phogat argued that she should be permitted to participate in the Asian Games trials scheduled for 30-31 May.

He emphasised that while internationally, the ranking and status of female athletes on maternity leave are protected, the latest WFI policy excluded Phogat.

"You have already been declared ineligible. How can we grant you that relief without hearing the other side? The (WFI) policy will have to be looked into. There are competing interests. Yes, we appreciate (that you were on a maternity break), but at the same time, there is the national interest. Let them file a reply," Justice Kaurav remarked orally.

When Phogat's counsel urged the court to let her participate in the trials, the court retorted, "There is no point in allowing you and then telling you that whatever you have done is a complete nullity."

Justice Kaurav granted the respondents two weeks to file their replies to the petition, adding that it would not be possible for him to decide the case before the high court closes for summer vacation in June.

Phogat's counsel said there was "something more than what meets the eye" in this case, as she was barred from participating in a competition in Gonda on May 10-11, a day after she was issued the show cause notice.

"The show cause notice was issued to me on May 9, raising issues of the Paris Olympics 2024. There is something more than what meets the eye," the senior counsel said, adding that Phogat should be allowed to give a detailed reply to the notice. *—PTI*

RR seek all-round improvement in must-win game against LSG

RR has been relying on Sooryavanshi for flying starts

JAIPUR, 18 MAY

RR VS LSG @ Sawai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur
7.30 pm IST

Lucknow Super Giants' captain Rishabh Pant with teammates *-PTI*

Their playoff hopes hanging by a thread, the Rajasthan Royals will need an all-round improvement against the out-of-contention Lucknow Super Giants to stay alive in the Indian Premier League here on Tuesday.

At the high-scoring Sawai Mansingh Stadium, the Royals are yet to win a game this season, and the final fixture here is a do-or-die one for the home team.

Following Tuesday's fixture, the Royals' last game is also against a vanquished outfit the Mumbai Indians.

In Delhi on Sunday night, RR should have out-batted Delhi Capitals, but a lower-order collapse cost them the match, in which their fielding and bowling were also fairly ordinary.

Royals have been relying heavily on 15-year-old Vaibhav Sooryavanshi for flying starts, but the youngster has not gotten enough support from Yashasvi Jaiswal at the other end.

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi *-PTI*

Dhruv Jurel has played some sublime knocks, but the one on Sunday night was a rather subdued one with wickets falling at the other end.

Captain Riyan Parag was underwhelming in the first half of the IPL but has picked up the pace in the recent games. He would want his side to be much more clinical in the last five overs with the bat.

The catching and fielding have generally been poor in the IPL, and the Royals, too, have been guilty of grassing easy chances.

Post the loss to Delhi Capitals, Parag had expressed his frustration with the team not playing to its potential in the business end of the tournament.

"The fielding was poor. If we keep on playing like this, we shouldn't be in contention for the top four," Parag had stated while acknowledging that the team's fate is no longer in its own hands. *—PTI*

Rajasthan Royals can beat any team if we play to potential: Rathour

Rajasthan Royals batting coach Vikram Rathour says his team can still qualify for the IPL play-offs by winning its remaining two league matches, asserting that the side can beat any opponent if it plays to its potential. Placed sixth in the standings with 12 points, RR face Lucknow Super Giants at home on May 19 before travelling to take on Mumbai Indians in their final league fixture on 24 May. "We are planning to win every match. It's not that we are waiting for the last two matches to win. Every game is important for us, and we are trying to win," Rathour said at the post-match press conference. "The situation is that we have to win both games. We believe that if we are playing to our potential, we can defeat any team. That is the mindset. We need to turn up and play our best cricket," he said. Rathour also provided an update on senior spin-all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja, saying the team management had opted to rest him as a precaution because of a knee niggle. "He just had some niggle in his knee. They felt that if we gave him one more game break, it would be good for him.

SUPER CLASSIC CHESS

Praggnanandhaa held Jorden van Foreest for a draw with black pieces
-X/@GRANDCHESSTOUR

Pragg held by Foreest; Keymer surges ahead

BUCHAREST, 18 MAY

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa played out a draw with Dutchman Jorden Van Foreest even as Germany's Vincent Keymer surged ahead following a facile victory in the fourth round of Super Chess Classic here.

With a sole win over Alireza Firouzja of France and three draws, Praggnanandhaa inched to 2.5 points out of a possible four, while Vincent moved to the sole lead on three points after beating Franch Maxime Vachier-Lagrave of France.

On a day when Anish Giri also got an easy draw against World Championships challenger Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan, Wesley So was also held to a draw by Deac Bogdan-Daniel of Romania.

Firouzja abstained from playing the fourth round, citing health issues.

Praggnanandhaa faced an irregular opening as black and did not have any trouble equalising.

Van Foreest, who is slowly gaining ground and is already in the top 20 of world rankings, pushed harder for a win among the two. As it happened, the players decided to repeat, and the truce was called in just 35 moves.

Keymer was a class act as Vachier-Lagrave was outdone in the middle game.

After an English attack against the Najdorf Sicilian, Keymer sensed his chances with white pieces and launched a central attack that worked well, given that the Frenchman had clear weaknesses on the king's side.

Keymer pounced on an opportunity that gave him a rook for a bishop, and just moments later, Vachier-Lagrave erred decisively to lose further material. It was all over in just 38 moves. *—PTI*

Former England Test captain Mike Smith passes away

ENGLAND, 18 MAY

Former England Test captain Mike Smith has died at the age of 92, his former county side Warwickshire announced on Monday. The bespectacled batter, known by his initials MJK, played 50 Tests for England, captaining on 25 occasions, and was also a rugby union international, earning one cap against Wales in 1956. He made his Test debut against New Zealand in 1958 and played his final Test against Australia in 1972. In total, he scored nearly 40,000 first-class runs with 72 centuries, three of them in Test cricket. Smith served as Warwickshire chairman between 1991 and 2003, a period during which the club won multiple trophies.*—PTI*

Real Madrid and Dani Carvajal are parting ways

MADRID, 18 MAY

Veteran defender Dani Carvajal will not return to Real Madrid next season, the club said on Monday. Madrid said the club and the player "have agreed to bring an end to a wonderful chapter as a player of our club at the conclusion of the current season." Carvajal's contract ends in June. The 34-year-old right back joined Madrid in 2002 and has played 23 seasons with the Spanish powerhouse - 10 in the academy and 13 with the main squad. "Dani Carvajal is a legend and a symbol of Real Madrid and its academy," club president Florentino Pérez said. "His image alongside our beloved and remembered Alfredo Di Stéfano laying the first stone of Ciudad Real Madrid will forever remain in the hearts of all madridistas and in the history of our club.*—PTI*

Aaron Rai runs away with PGA Championship

NEWTOWN SQUARE, 18 MAY

Aaron Rai shifted into high gear Sunday and pulled away from a world-class field with one amazing shot after another until he became the first English-born player in more than a century to capture the PGA Championship. Rai, who dreamed of being a Formula 1 driver until he turned to golf as a boy, was three shots behind and approaching the turn at Aronimink Golf Club when he delivered a performance worthy of a major champion. He made a 40-foot eagle putt on the par-5 ninth during a stretch when he one-putted seven straight greens to take the lead.*—PTI*

-PTI

Chauhan re-elected as CWG Chess Association Chairman

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

Veteran Indian sports administrator Bharat Singh Chauhan has been re-elected unanimously as the Chairman of the Commonwealth Chess Association (CCA) for a four-year term. The elections were held during the Annual General Body Meeting of the Commonwealth Chess Association in Wasakaduwa, Sri Lanka, on Sunday. "Mr Chauhan's re-election reflects the confidence and trust reposed in his visionary leadership and long-standing dedication towards strengthening and promoting chess across the Commonwealth nations," stated a press release from the CCA.*—PTI*

LEVELLED FOUR-MATCH SERIES 1-1

Dominant India U-18 men beat Australia 6-3 to level series

BHOPAL, 18 MAY

-PTI

A clinical Indian U-18 men's hockey team bounced back to register a commanding 6-3 victory over their Australian counterparts in the third match of the series at the Udhav Das Mehta (Bhai Ji) Central SAI Centre here on Monday.

With this win, the hosts have levelled the four-match series 1-1. India held the Aussies to a 2-2 draw in the series opener before losing the second match 1-3 on Sunday.

India took early control of the match with a blistering first-half performance.

Akash Deep (10th minute) opened the scoring in the first quarter, followed quickly by a strike from Shahrukh Ali (14th).

The hosts intensified the pressure in the second quarter, with Ketan Kushwaha (25th) and Romit Pal (26th) finding the back of the net in quick succession to give India a comfortable cushion.

Kushwaha (40th) continued his fine form to score his second of the match in the third quarter, before Ansh Bahutra (45th) capped off India's scoring fest. Australia attempted a fightback with goals from Owen Taylor (23rd), Oscar Freeman (29th) and Jack Weller (32nd), but the Indian defence stood firm in the final quarter to deny the visitors any further breakthrough and secure a comprehensive win.

The fourth and final match of the series will be played on Wednesday at the same venue. *—PTI*

Ousmane set for calf treatment days before CL final

PARIS, 18 MAY

PSG striker Ousmane Dembele will undergo treatment over the next few days ahead of the Champions League final, his club said on Monday, citing discomfort in his right calf muscle.

The French forward was forced off the field after 27 minutes during PSG's 2-1 loss to Paris FC on Sunday, on the final day of the French league.

PSG coach Luis Enrique said after the game that he thought Dembélé's substitution was due to fatigue.

PSG said in a statement Monday that the player was "taken off as a precau tion." *—PTI*

2ND TEST: MUSHFIQUR INSPIRES B'DESH TO A STRONG LEAD OVER PAK

SYLHET, 18 MAY

Mushfiqur Rahim hit a record-breaking century as Bangladesh set Pakistan a daunting 437 runs for victory in the second cricket test on Monday.

Rahim struck a superb 137 off 233, smashing 12 fours and one six to help Bangladesh post 390 in the second innings. Litton Das followed his first-innings 126 with an elegant 69. Mushfiqur's 14th century saw him surpass Mominul Haque to become the country's most prolific test centurion.

The task Pakistan faces is stark: no other team in test cricket history has ever won a match chasing more than 418 runs.

Pakistan batted two overs on Day 3 without scoring a run before bad light forced an early stumps. Khurram Shahzad, who claimed 4-86, trapped skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto lbw with a sharp inswinger in the fourth over for Pakistan's only success in the morning session after the hosts resumed at 110-3. Das and Rahim frustrated the Pakistan attack, negotiating the disciplined bowling with equal resolve.

They added 123 runs for the fifth wicket to put Bangladesh in control.

Pacer Hasan Ali undid Das with a short-pitched delivery to break the stand, but by then Bangladesh's lead had surged close to 300.

Pakistan 232 and 0 for 0 (Fazal 0, Awais 0) need 437 runs to win vs Bangladesh 278 and 390 (Mushfiqur 137, Litton 69, Shahzad 4-86, Sajid 3-126). *—PTI*

Jannik Sinner enters French Open on a 29-match win streak

ROME, 18 MAY

From the California desert to Miami, Monte Carlo to Madrid, and the red clay of Rome, too, nobody has been able to beat Jannik Sinner for three full months.

By sweeping the first five Masters 1000 tournaments of the year, the top-ranked Sinner has dominated tennis like few other players have in the sport's recent history while amassing a 29-match winning streak.

And yet now the stakes are rising for Sinner as he attempts to complete a career Grand Slam by winning the French Open. The clay-court Grand Slam, which starts on Sunday in Paris, is the only major that Sinner hasn't won.

A couple of hours after becoming the first Italian man to win the Italian Open in 50 years on Sunday, Sinner's focus was already pivoting toward Roland Garros.

"We don't have much time to realise what we're accomplishing," Sinner said. "I said it before the start of the year: My main goal is and remains Paris.

"What we've done here and the rest of the year is incredible. I realise that. But mentally, I know that now I've got to do all the right things. It's necessary to rest, but I also need to stay in form because soon my most important tournament of the year is approaching. I don't want to put too much pressure on myself, because that comes by itself." *—PTI*

MALAYSIA MASTERS 2026

Lakshya Sen to lead Indian contingent

KUALA LUMPUR, 18 MAY

Lakshya Sen *-PTI*

Lakshya Sen will spearhead an Indian contingent missing some of the other big names as the action begins at the Malaysia Masters in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday.

India's top men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, who finished runner-up at last week's Thailand Open, double Olympic medallist P. V. Sindhu, Kidambi Srikanth, youngsters Ayush Shetty and Unnati Hooda, and mixed doubles duo of Tanisha Crasto and Dhruv Kapila have all opted to skip the BWF World Tour Super 500 tournament.

While star Indian shuttler Lakshya Sen, who had missed the Thomas Cup tie due to an elbow injury, will open against Indonesia's Moh Zaki Ubaidillah, Tharun Mannepalli will take on France's Toma Junior Popov, Kiran George will face seventh seed Alex Lanier, and HS Prannoy will meet Christo Popov.

S Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian will have to come through the qualifying rounds. In men's doubles, Hariharan Amsakarunan and MR Arjun, who did not get an opportunity in the Thomas Cup semifinal, will be keen to make a statement when they face the seventh-seeded French pair of Christo Popov and Toma Junior Popov.

Among Indian women singles players, Tanvi Sharma will take on Thailand's Pitchamon Opatniputh, sixth seed Unnati Hooda will face China's Han Qian Xi, Malvika Bansod will clash with Germany's Yvonne Li, and Anmol Kharb will meet eighth seed Denmark's Line Hojmark Kjaersfeldt. *—PTI*